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# Perceptions of Academic and Social Integration of First-Generation College Students at a Less-Selective Private Faith-Based University

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PERCEPTIONS OF ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION  
OF FIRST GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS AT A  
LESS-SELECTIVE PRIVATE FAITH-BASED UNIVERSITY

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A Dissertation  
Presented to  
the Graduate School  
of Clemson University

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirement for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Educational Leadership  
Higher Education Concentration

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by  
Ann Marie Watson  
May 2014

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Accepted by:  
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Dr. Catherine Watt

## ABSTRACT

The overarching goal of this qualitative research project was to fill a gap in first-generation retention literature pertaining to the particular academic and social integration issues weighting the probability of persistence for first-generation students who choose to attend a less-selective, private, faith-based university with strictly limited resources available to support high-risk students.

This project was a single case study of a university that serves an undergraduate population where close to 60% fit the first-generation student profile of primary interest in this study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted on a purposeful sample of 12 first-generation college students at the university during their first semester at the university. While most retention research has been focused on year-to-year persistence, this study aimed to concentrate on the critical first semester to examine how student perceptions of their academic and social integration experiences during their first semester at the university influenced their decision to persist into the second semester.

The findings of this research may be beneficial to informing improvements to the student success programming for first-generation students not only at this particular university, but could also be generalized to other niche institutions that are similar in mission.

## DEDICATION

First and foremost I dedicate the victory in completing this project to my Lord Jesus Christ who has been faithful in helping me to overcome every obstacle along this journey and has provided the wisdom and clarity I have needed at every passageway.

Second, I also dedicate the completion of this project to my loving husband, David, who has supported me throughout my entire passage through higher education with unswerving support, patience, and encouragement.

Third, I dedicate this doctoral degree to my late father, George W. Karges, Sr., and to my mother, Mary Ann Karges, whose strong work ethic and persistent nature have always inspired me to strive for my very best in every endeavor.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

#### **Overview of First-Generation College Students**

Over the last few decades, advances in increased access to higher education for many historically underrepresented groups—coupled with increased college participation rates among high school graduates—have generated an influx of new college students, some of whom are the first in their immediate family to go to college. First-generation college students (FGCS) have been receiving increased attention from researchers, academic administrators, and policymakers with the goal of better understanding their college decision-making process and supporting their progress through higher education. This is a critical population of students to study because of the general perception that, relative to their peers, these students have poorer academic preparation, different motivations for enrolling in college, varying levels of parental support and involvement, different expectations for their college experience, and significant obstacles in their path to persistence and academic success.

#### **Changing Demographics of FGCS**

These first-generation students reflect the changing demographics in the United States and are among the fastest growing segments of our college population (Jehangir, 2010). By one appraisal, 24% of students enrolled in all of postsecondary education today are first generation (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Historically, FGCS have predominantly attended state colleges (Saenz, Hurtado, Barrera, Wolf, & Yeung, 2007; Ishanti, 2006); however, the number of FGCS choosing to enroll in private institutions has increased

across time, resulting in a narrowed enrollment gap between the private and public sectors within higher education (Saenz, et al. 2007).

According to data extracted from the 2005 *Cooperative Institutional Research Program* (CIRP) freshman survey, the proportion of first-generation students *within the overall population* of first-time, full-time entering college freshman at four-year institutions has steadily declined. In 1971, FGCS represented 38% of all first-time, full-time freshman, a figure that dropped in half by 1992. By 2005, the proportion of first-time, full-time, freshman FGCS had declined to 15.9% of all entering freshman; concurrent with this proportional drop in the FGCS freshman population has been a steady redistribution of FGCS across the various sectors of public and private higher education (Saenz, et al. 2007). Thus, while the proportion of FGCS enrolled in higher education has *decreased*, actual enrollment for this demographic across various sectors within higher education is *increasing*.

### **Migration from Public to Private**

In exploring the enrollment trends of FGCS by public versus private institutional-type, we find that first-generation students represented 42.5% of the enrollment at public institutions in 1971 and 30.5% of enrollment at private institutions that same year. Although the *proportion* of FGCS at both public and private institutions has decreased over time, enrollment of this group has remained slightly more prevalent at public two-year and four-year institutions, as compared to the private sector. Interestingly, the *proportional gap* in the enrollment of FGCS between public and private institutions narrowed to 4.7 percentage points by 2005, down from 12.0 points in 1971—evidence

that suggested more first-generation students were choosing to attend a private, rather than a public institution. Moreover, some demographic differences exist between FGCS who attend public college versus those who attend private universities; most notable is that the proportion of FGCS who come from underrepresented racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups has been *higher* within the public sector (Saenz, et al., 2007). Hence, it follows that if more first-generation students have been migrating into the private sector, they are also more likely to be represented by minority and high-risk groups.

### **Looking Beyond Access**

Thayer (2000) reported that while *access* was the main concern of educators in the mid-1960s, the chief issue in the 1990s and beyond has been *retention*. He also reported that students from low-income, first-generation backgrounds are the least likely to persist to degree completion. In one assessment, the attrition rate of FGCS enrolled in their first year of college was 26%, as compared to 7% for their continuing-generation counterparts (2000). In addition, Pike and Kuh (2005) cited a 15% difference in the average national three-year persistence rate between first-generation and second-generation college students—73% and 88%, respectively. Another source estimated that in public four-year institutions only 34% of first-generation students earned a bachelor's degree within six years, as compared to 66% of their Continuing-Generation Student (CGCS) peers (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Based on that data, concerns for FGCS have been well-founded. While FGCS have successfully established for themselves a place on college rosters, they struggle and need support in staying there.

## **High-risk for Attrition**

Why do some students succeed in college while others do not? Specifically, why are some *types* of students predictably more likely to graduate from college, while others consistently pose retention problems? In particular, FGCS have been considered an *at-risk* population. First-generation students are considered less likely to graduate than their peers who have at least one parent with a college education (Chen, 2005). *High-risk* students have been the subject of extensive research, most of it focused on the obstacles they face in achieving a college degree. Defined as those students whose academic preparation, prior school performance, or personal characteristics may contribute to academic failure or early departure from college (Choy, 2002), the terms *high-risk* or *at-risk* imply that risk level is conceptualized on a continuum rather than as a static quality that a student possesses unequivocally (Pizzolato, 2003). Personal characteristics that may place a student at risk for not succeeding in college are identified as those features that locate the student in a population without a long or necessarily successful history in higher education. Examples of such students include those who are the first in their family to attend postsecondary education, students with low socioeconomic status, and those of certain minority ethnic groups (Schreiner, Noel, Anderson & Cantwell, 2011).

### **First-Generation Demographics**

FGCS are a high-risk population that has been disproportionally represented by (a) ethnic and racial minority students, (b) those with poor academic preparation, as determined by standardized measures like American College Test (ACT) scores, and (c) those with lower high school ranking and grade point average (GPA). They are also more

likely to be low-income, single parents and non-native speakers of English (Aguayo, Herman, Ojeda, & Flores, 2011; Choy, 2001; Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005; Phinney & Hass, 2003; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996).

### **Under Preparedness**

FGCS often come from high schools that lack a high level of academic rigor (Green, 2006; Tym, McMillion, Barone, & Webster, 2004) and ones that may be failing to provide adequate skill development and cultural preparation for college that could be of particular benefit to this demographic (Dennis et al., 2005; Ishitani, 2006; Hudley, Moshetti, Gonzalez, Cho, Barry, & Kelly, 2009; Tym, et al., 2004). Such grounding includes time management, organization skills, and study skills (Tym et al., 2004). The research literature on this demographic also indicated that FGCS are more likely to attend high schools that are lacking in areas linked with educational advantages (Ishitani, 2006; Padgett et al., 2012). These privileges include study abroad opportunity, sufficient technology resources, supportive standardized testing experiences, assistance with writing skill development, and college preparatory course content (Zalaquett, 1999).

Overall, FGCS have been less likely than their CGCS peers to receive college preparatory support at the high school level (Hudley et al., 2009; Ishitani et al., 2006). Further, research has indicated that Caucasian FGCS are more likely to receive pre-college support from their high schools than their racial/ethnic minority FGCS peers (Tym, et al., 2004). When high schools fail in these areas, *college-educated* parents possess the cultural knowledge to help guide their child through this process.



## **Financial Limitations**

Researchers have pointed to issues relating to financial limitations as a likely motivator to explain the tendency for FGCS to select a college within 50 miles of their family home (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Pascarella, et al., 2004; Saenz, et al. 2007). Their shortage of financial resources typically drives FGCS to seek less-costly, off-campus living arrangements and to maintain part-time or even full-time employment. In fact, being heavily weighted down by external obligations has been identified as a facet of the FGCS profile that is likely to impede their opportunity for academic and social integration on campus (Bui, 2002; Engle & Tinto, 2008).

Despite the opportunity to apply for financial aid, the average unmet need for first-generation students *before accounting for loans* is close to \$6,000 (Engle & Tinto, 2008). For FGCS, working to cover the cost of college or borrowing beyond their means presents an obvious deterrent to completing a degree. The inextricable relationship between income and college completion was reflected in 2007 bachelor's degree completion rates wherein students from the lowest income quartile graduated at 24.5%—compared with 47.6% and 94.6% for students in the two uppermost quartiles, respectively (Mortenson, 2008).

## **Differences between FGCS and CGCS**

One important thing that has differentiated FGCS from their peers is the fact that they did not grow up around adults who completed college. As a result, FGCS have been less exposed to the support and other contributing factors that provide preparation and backing to CGCS as they navigate through college (Mehta, Newbold, & O'Rourke,

2011). Most FGCS must figure out how to traverse the complex path to college success—relative to financial aid, housing, and many other challenges—with little help from families who are not equipped with such knowledge of the system. Once they get into college, they carry not only their own individual hopes but often the aspirations of their families and communities.

### **Cultural Capital**

Another critical area of under-preparedness for FGCS is their lack of cultural preparation for the college experience, including knowledge of cultural norms, rules, roles, expectations, communication and relationship formation, educational pathway, and bureaucratic navigation skills (Barry, Hudley, Kelly, & Cho, 2009; Bryan & Simmons, 2009; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolnaik, & Terenzini, 2004; Tym et al., 2004). In short, FGCS lack *cultural capital*, a term used to describe the tangible and intangible elements in society that provide advantages and disadvantages to certain individuals living in that society (Jehangir, 2010). As such, cultural capital is contextual, but in most cases it is the normative majority culture that holds the type of capital that confers membership, status, and opportunity to individuals in that society. In higher education, cultural capital is the currency that allows certain students to apply to college, navigate the implicit and explicit expectations of school, and make social connections that serve as networks of support during and after college (Jehangir, 2010). This familiarity is developed and passed on from interactions with others. In most instances, cultural capital would be learned from parents or peers who are attending or have completed college (2010).

## **Academic and Social Integration**

On campus, first-generation students must try to make sense of the explicit and implicit expectations, rituals, and norms of the higher education culture—a process that can be simultaneously exhilarating, overwhelming and alienating. Not surprisingly, students often struggle with balancing the demands of work, family, and school—on top of having difficulty grasping what is expected of them in a given class or on a given assignment (Jehangir, 2010).

While at college, FGCS are less involved in on-campus activities (Dennis, et al., 2005; Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005; Lundberg, Schreiner, Hovaguimian, & Slavin Miller, 2007; Pascarella, et al., 2004; Pike & Kuh, 2005). Financial struggles may force FGCS to work more hours, resulting in lower levels of on-campus involvement (Lundberg, et al., 2007). FGCS have also reported less involvement with student acquaintances (Lundberg, et al., 2007); again, financial responsibilities and commuter status may help explain these findings. In addition, Lundberg, et al. (2007) found that less student involvement among FGCS had a negative effect on their learning.

## **FGCS at Private Institutions**

With the gap decreasing between expenses at state-funded schools and private institutions, the choice to attend a private college is becoming a practicable option for many FGCS (Saenz, et al., 2007). There have been various studies on retention strategies, institutional selectivity, and student persistence focused specifically on FGCS. Most have assumed an overarching national perspective (Berkner, He, & Cataldi, 2002; Gansemer-Topf & Schuh, 2006; Ishanti & DesJardins, 2002), highlighting institutional or

student characteristics (Braxton, 2003; St. John, Cabrera, Nora, & Asker, 2000, Thomas & Bean, 1988). However, there are not many studies of FGCS persistence within the context of the private university sector.

Among the few is Schee's (2008) quantitative, longitudinal investigation of *Council of Christian College and University (CCCU)* institutions. Researchers examined the utilization of student retention programs at 69 of 102 CCCU members to measure impact of these programs on freshman persistence and graduation rates. Schools in the study were categorized according to selectivity: *noncompetitive* (n=2), *minimally competitive* (n=5), *moderately competitive* (n=59), and *very competitive* (n=3). Data for the study came from results of a survey instrument completed by the admissions director for each participating institution. Findings from this study were consistent with research indicating that *as institutional selectivity rises*, so does the probability of degree completion, in general (Ethington, 1997). Not addressed within this study, however, was a critical analysis of how the persistence differential *between* CCCU institutions varied on the basis of college selectivity. A deeper analysis of this sort may have provided important insight to understanding issues related to challenges faced by high-risk subgroups at private institutions, such as FGCS.

### **FGCS and College Selectivity**

Among the limited retention research dedicated to FGCS at private institutions is a report by Saenz, et al. (2007) that tracked 35 years of enrollment on FGCS and their CGCS peers, utilizing survey data collected through the 2005 *Cooperative Institutional Research Program* (CIRP) Freshman Survey, spanning from 1971 to 2005. A special

section of the report was devoted to exploring selected characteristics of FGCS who chose to attend private institutions. Among the findings were that, in general, first-generation students attending *private institutions* were more likely to have families with an annual income over \$40,000, more likely to have attended a private high school (religious or non-denominational), and more likely to have earned grades of “A” in their classes, as compared to their first-generation peers at *public institutions* (Saenz, et al., 2007). In addition, the report indicated that FGCS were more likely to choose to attend private colleges for reasons of size and because they received financial assistance. Further, the report showed FGCS at private institutions were more likely to live on campus than FGCS who elected to attend public institutions (2007).

Other findings of the report revealed that, relative to their public counterparts, many private institutions tended to have a smaller undergraduate student body, fewer curricular offerings, and were more expensive; yet, they offered a variety of financial aid options, were more focused on teaching and learning, and had specific institution missions. Generalizing from these favorable factors for student engagement and retention (Saenz, et al., 2007), we might expect FGCS at all private institutions to enjoy high persistence and graduation rates. Indeed, ACT (2010) reported a 75% median (mean of 73%) first-year to second-year retention rate for FGCS across the sector of private, four-year colleges.

A significant caveat to the findings of this CIRP report, relating to first-generation students, was that survey responses were generally aggregated only by four-year institutional-type—either public or private. What was missing from the report was

important insight into persistence trends and inherent challenges faced by FGCS that may have been revealed by the survey data had it been further disaggregated by *institutional selectivity*.

### **Statement of the Problem**

It is well noted within the retention literature that college selection by FGCS is influenced by *location* (close to home), *cost* (available financial aid), *parental influence* (family aspirations), and *academic preparedness* (college selectivity). As to issues related to persistence rates, research focused toward high-risk students in the private sector has been conducted primarily from a deficit model—*reasons for leaving*—with little known about the individual stories or influential academic and social matters that factored into these students’ decision-making process. In addition, the research on access and persistence issues of FGCS has demonstrated that this population tends to cluster mostly in *two-year and four-year public institutions*; hence, the preponderance of literature of FGCS has emerged from those sectors. Further, the focus of much of retention research has been dedicated to identifying overarching institutional or student characteristics of FGCS to explain or predict their retention; therefore, *quantitative methodology*, in general, has dominated the style of research linked with FGCS retention studies.

In addition, national rates of student retention for all students is measured based on a year-to-year paradigm. Therefore, individual retention studies examining student academic and social integration issues—in general—and FGCS persistence studies, specifically, have been exclusively informed by a year-to-year framework of

investigation. In a good faith pursuit to uncover explanatory themes underlying student academic and social integrations experiences, delaying until *the end of the first year* to apply qualitative or quantitative probing poses a lost opportunity for gathering valuable insight that passes away with the students who did not to persist beyond their first semester in college.

Further, with the price gap between public and private institutions having narrowed within the past few years to a point where price-sensitive students now find privates a viable option, private institutions have observed a greater proportion of their classroom seats filled by students who are first-generation and high-risk. Of course, student persistence is important for all institutions of higher education; however, small private institutions with limited resources, particularly, are compelled to show prudent attention to student retention as a matter of fiscal sustainability. Since tuition revenues account for approximately 80% of all revenues at private colleges and universities, student enrollment is perhaps the single most weighted determinant of institutional effectiveness (Hossler, 2005).

Moreover, beyond enrolling new students to the institution, tuition revenue is generated by *retaining* new students to the second year. Thus, as the cost of providing post-secondary education continues to increase and government support steadily decreases, church-related private four-year institutions, in particular, are forced to rely more heavily on tuition revenue for economic viability (Schee, 2008) than their counterparts in public higher education. Not only does this drive the private institutions to increase enrollment rates, it also necessitates their diligent pursuit to increasing the

retention of their students who are already enrolled. In essence, small, church-affiliated colleges cannot *afford* to ignore issues related to student attrition (Schee, 2008).

Integration of first-year FGCS into the private realm presents an opportunity and a need for more directed in-depth study aimed at the academic and social integration issues that frame the experiences, challenges, and successes of FGCS in the private sector. More specifically, an urgent need exists to better understand the unique academic and social integration experiences of FGCS who are quickly filling seats at the less-selective, private institutions—those with lower admissions standards—which, arguably, have fewer resources to support the complex needs tied to the task of retaining a dense population of under-prepared, high-risk students.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The retention of first-generation students is a multi-layered concern. First, it affects the increasing number of first-generation students entering higher education who are constrained by a lack of preparedness. Second, it concerns the increasing number of resource-constrained private institutions challenged to support the labor-intensive support services for these students. Third, it directly impacts our national workforce which is constrained by a shallow pool of well-educated candidates to fill positions requiring advanced education.

FGCS often enter higher education with several academic and non-academic deficits, as compared to their CGCS peers (Thayer, 2000; Chen 2005), placing them at greater risk for dropping out of college. Interestingly, though, when first-generation students are able to persist, their outcomes are similar to those of students from other



family backgrounds. For instance, Choy (2002) found that FGCS who earned a bachelor's degree, despite the odds against them, had similar employment outcomes when compared with peers from college-educated families. In order to help first-generation students reap these benefits, educators and researchers must search out, understand, and address the distinctive needs of this population.

The overarching goal of this qualitative research project was to fill a gap in first-generation retention literature pertaining to the exclusive academic and social integration issues weighting the probability of persistence for first-generation students enrolled at private, faith-based institutions with less-selective admissions standards and strictly limited student support resources available to sustain a large concentration of high-risk students.

This project is a single case study of a university that serves an undergraduate population where an excess of 50% of the students fit the first-generation profile of primary interest in this study. The researcher in this study is employed as an academic administrator for the University with primary responsibility for overseeing the student academic support services for undergraduates, including first-year freshmen. Hence, the researcher anticipated that insights gained from this research would be useful for informing current practices and programming pedagogy at the University. Ultimately, the application of these findings could be applicable on a wider scale to make a positive impact on the likelihood of persistence for FGCS at other similar institutions.

### **Significance of the Study**

Although in recent years significant gains have been made in helping at-risk students access higher education, they have lagged far behind their traditional counterparts in the degree to which they persist and finish education programs. In particular, the researcher expects the findings of this study to make a contribution to the body of research on the retention of first-generation student by examining their personal experiences in a less-selective, private, faith-based institutional setting through the critical lens of Tinto's (1993) student model of academic and social integration.

The impetus for focusing on a single-institution qualitative study was supported by a 1993 study undertaken by Tinto to address criticism about the applicability of his student departure model to a broad range of student demographics (e.g., ethnic minorities, first-generation). Tinto cited the importance of institution-specific studies, noting that they tended to provide better information about the individual student than did national studies. Specifically, Tinto suggested that research reporting on individual students and individual institutions enhanced the total understanding of persistence and departure, saying, "Only institution specific studies...can provide insight into circumstances" (Tinto, 1993, p. 22).

Constraints on financial security and social and academic integration might explain why even though more and more first-generation students have matriculated to postsecondary institutions, not enough are earning a degree (Adleman, 2007). In fact, first generation students have been the least likely subpopulation to earn a degree (Kelly, 2005). Research is abundant to support the financial concerns and academic and social

integration stressors faced by FGCS, in general; less obtainable are in-depth studies of individual students within the niche sector of private, faith-based, less-selective institutions.

The benefit of this research project to the body of retention research is to give depth to the understanding of the academic and social integration challenges faced by high-risk FGCS in private niche institutional settings that are uniquely challenged by resource constraints to provide the types of progressive, often labor intensive, and costly student support interventions and learning pedagogies recommended by best practice research to augment success and persistence of FGCS toward the goal of college graduation.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Knowing more about what supports first-generation student undergraduates to advance from one year to the next, and more specifically, how they come to be successfully integrated into the social and academic life of the university and earn a degree has been the focus of much research. Commonly-accepted explanations of college students' success or failure have tended to emphasize the complex relationships between the characteristics of institutions and the characteristics of individual students (Terenzini et al., 1996). In one of the best-known general models of student success, Tinto (1975, 1993) proposed that new students started with a pre-enrollment package of individual attributes, previous schooling, and level of family support. These had a direct effect on the students' desire to complete a degree, which Tinto referred to as *academic*

*integration*. The same variables also affected the students' desire to get a degree at a particular institution, or what Tinto called *social integration* (Collier & Morgan, 2008).

In search of a clearer institutional understanding of student persistence, many colleges and universities have benefited from Tinto's (1987, 1993) nearly paradigmatic theory of college persistence (Guiffida, 2006). Although it is not without its critics, Tinto's theory of student persistence has provided an empirical model for generalizations about what it takes to succeed in college. Namely, student persistence is tied to integration—into not only the academic, but also the social life of the university—through student-to-faculty and peer-to-peer interaction within and outside the classroom. While Tinto's theory stressed the importance of students' relationships, much of the application of his work has been quantitative in nature, with a focus toward developing predictive therapies useful for identifying the likelihood of whether one versus another student would choose to persist or drop out of college.

### **Research Methodology**

This research study, in contrast to much of the large-scale quantitative research which has dominated higher education, sought to gain a better understanding of some of the most pressing issues faced by FGCS who struggle to earn a bachelor's degree by using basic interpretive qualitative research (Merriam, 2002) to examine the unique individual circumstances of FGCS during their first-semester in college. More specifically, this study examined the academic and social integration experiences of first-generation, first-time, full-time freshmen at a single, less-selective, faith-based institution. The university in this study is a four-year, private, Baptist-affiliated,

university located in the Southeast region of the United States. Studying the interactive experiences of first-generation students in this distinctive campus environment to illuminate issues of academic and social integration may be helpful to educators working with this population in similarly unique environments.

The choice to study this particular institution was two-fold: (a) the researcher has special inside knowledge of the university from an academic administrator's perspective, and (b) the university qualifies as an excellent study for this particular research topic given that a significant proportion of the school's undergraduate, freshman population mirrored critical descriptors of the typical first-generation student population.

Using a qualitative approach provided the opportunity to give a voice to observations, concerns, and opinions of high-risk students related to their individual pathway toward integrating into the academic and social domain of their chosen college. In fact, Baxter Magolda, stated that *self-authorship* is "the internal capacity to define one's beliefs, identity, and social relations" (2008, p. 269). It involves cultivating a capacity to make meaning of one's experiences, both positive and negative, in cognitive, interpersonal and interpersonal frames. This process of developing a sense of self-authorship is especially relevant to first-generation students; it gives them the opportunity to reflect on their own narratives, creates a framework for understanding the past events of their life, and helps to form their future actions (Jehangir, 2010).

### **Research Questions**

We are guided and shaped by not only what has objectively happened to us, but also by what *we think* has happened to us. This meaning-building process is evident in the

stories first-generation, low-income students tell us about their lives. Hence, the following questions provided a framework for examining the particular academic and social integration experiences that affected the persistence of first generation, high-risk students at a single, private, faith-based institution:

- How do freshman first-generation, high-risk college students perceive that they fit in *academically* at their school?
- How do freshman first-generation, high-risk college students perceive the faculty and staff at their college were instrumental in helping them integrate *academically* during their first semester?
- How do freshman first-generation, high-risk college students perceive that they fit in *socially* at their school?
- How do freshman first-generation, high-risk college students perceive the faculty and staff at their college were instrumental in helping them integrate *socially* during their first semester?
- How do perceptions of academic and social integration of first-time, full-time, FGCS affect their intent to persist into their second semester of college?

### **Definitions**

The following definitions of terms apply throughout this study:

- *Academic Integration*: The degree to which new students accept and incorporate the academic norms of the University. Tinto (1994) suggested that academic integration was partially based on the integration and expectations that new students bring with them to college.

- *Social Integration*: The degree to which students become engaged with the social life of the University. It is measured along several dimensions. College social involvement includes membership in student organizations and attendance at cultural, athletic, and recreational events. It includes engagements with faculty and staff members inside and outside the classroom environment.
- *Continuing-Generation College Student (CGCS)*: A student who has at least one parent who has earned a post-secondary degree (Engle, 2007).
- *Financial Aid*: Any form of formal financial support awarded to college students to help pay for tuition or living expenses, including student loans, grants, scholarships, or work-study programs.
- *FGCS (FGCS)*: A student whose grandparents and parents have not yet earned a post-secondary degree (Engle, 2007).
- *University*: The University where the study is being conducted and where students who are participating in the research project currently enrolled.
- *Minority Students*: For the purpose of this study, minority student would include specifically African-American and Latino students.
- *Low-Income*: Being from a low-income background is usually associated with first-generation status; however not all first-generation students are low-income. Several studies have reported significant differences in parental or family income of first-generation students compared to those of non-first-generation students in income between these groups (Lee et al., 2004; Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005; Pascarella et al., 2003; Terenzini et al., 1996). For the purpose of this study, low-

income refers to students whose yearly family incomes (for a family of four) fall in the range of \$20,000 to \$25,000 (Kazis, 2002; Phillippe & Valiga, 2000).

- *Best Practice:* For the purpose of this study, best practice refers to those practices and standards identified through retention research that have produced outstanding results and are used as a benchmark for higher education.

### **Limitations of the Study**

A major limitation of this study is the potential to generalize these findings, not only to the larger population of high-risk first-generation students attending the institution, but also to the macro population of high-risk first-generation students across other institutions, because the group being studied is such a small portion of the overall population. Although qualitative studies have been helpful to investigate the complex lives of individuals, it is difficult to conduct the type of research beyond the context of a small-group setting (Merriam, 2002). This is an inherent limitation of semi-structured methodology and most qualitative research designs. “Unlike quantitative research that assumes the need to generalize the results of the study, qualitative research by its very nature can only apply results directly to the context of the study”(Stringer, 2004, p. 59). Therefore, this single-site case study involved a limited number of research subjects selected from a non-random sample. Nevertheless, this study has value for directing future research possibilities and looking for repeating patterns on a wider scale.

A second major limitation of the study is researcher bias. The researcher has been a school administrator at the institution for over 20 years. In addition, the researcher has been both a director of student success programming and a member of the president's



retention task force. Although this has allowed the researcher a greater degree of access to research subjects, her objectivity may be contaminated to some degree by both prior knowledge of several of the research subjects and the nature of the professional relationships that developed between the researcher and some of the respondents. The use of the Tinto conceptual framework as the driving force of the study partially overcomes this research bias. The use of established interview protocols also helped to improve the trustworthiness of the data.

In addition, the interviews with the students were based on self-reports. This is also a limitation of the study and a potential threat to the validity of the findings. One weakness of interviews, according to Kendall, is that “people may be less than truthful, especially on emotionally charged issues...making reliance on self-reported attitudes problematic” (2003, p. 54). Another limitation of self-reports is that “responses may be what people profess to believe rather than what they actually believe” (Giddens, Duneier, & Appelbaum, 2005, p. 37). There may be a tendency in self-reports for the respondents to give what they perceive to be socially approved responses, rather than their actual opinions on certain subjects.

### **Organization of the Study**

This study is divided into five chapters to detail the study on the perceptions of academic and social integration experiences of FGCS in a private, semi-selective, faith-based institution:

**Chapter I** comprises an explanation of the nature of the problem and an overview of the planned study.

**Chapter II** contains a review of the literature that is germane to the study of high-risk FGCS. Details of the theoretical framework will be introduced.

**Chapter III** describes the research methodology of the study, including the study design, sample, interviews, and data analysis procedures.

**Chapter IV** outlines the findings of the full study.

**Chapter V** presents discussion of the major findings and includes recommendations for further study.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **General Research on First-Generation Students**

Case study research generally answers one or more questions which begin with “how” or “why”. The questions are targeted to a limited number of events or conditions and their inter-relationships. To assist in targeting and formulating the questions, researchers typically conduct a literature review (Yin, 2009).

The decision to pursue a college education can be a daunting process, even for the best prepared. A statistical examination of youth from low-income families indicated that a mere 60% are graduating from high schools; only one in three will enroll in college and only one in seven can expect to obtain a bachelor’s degree (Bedsworth, Colby, & Doctor, 2006). Research also indicated that low-income, often first-generation, (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Choy, 2001) families feel ill-equipped to provide advice to their children (Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis, 2007), are more reliant upon the school to properly prepare their children (Hsiao, 1992), and are more likely to have their children enroll in remedial college coursework (Conley, 2007). They may even be less optimistic in believing their children have the ability to try pursuing higher education; this, in turn, may influence parenting behaviors that reduce opportunity (Duncan, Brooks, Gunn, Yeung, & Smith, 1998).

First-generation college students are said to “embody the realization of social mobility; they break a pattern of intergenerational inheritance of educational level which is not easy to achieve” (Gofen, 2009, p. 104). Most often, children of parents who did

not attend college are also likely to obtain a minimal level of education (Choy, 2001). Those who seek to change this pattern may experience more complicated transition issues than continuing-generation students during the high school-to-college transition (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Choy, Horn, Nunez, & Chen, 2000). Overcoming such obstacles is critical in order for students to persevere from college enrollment through graduation.

Understanding the integration of first-generation college students is important for several reasons. While graduation rates for U.S. colleges and universities have declined for several years (Astin & Oseguera, 2005, Thayer, 2000), the *College Completion Study* (Ashby, 2003) found that only 43% of first-generation students who enrolled at four-year institutions earned a bachelor's degree, compared to 59% for continuing-generation students. The risk of departure during the first year is 71% higher for first-generation students than for their continuing-generation peers; yet, the number and proportion of first-generation college students entering higher education continues to grow (Ishanti, 2006).

### **First-Generation Students and Issues of Access**

When examining the literature regarding first-generation college students, college *access*, as well as retention and persistence emerged as well-researched themes. First-generation college students tend to have difficulty accessing higher education for a variety of reasons. The literature pertaining to this topic suggested the following as common reasons: (a) parents do not have the college experience to assist their first-generation children in the various aspects of applying to college (e.g. financial aid and

application process), (b) first-generation students are not prepared for the academic rigor of college due to their high school preparation, (c) students demonstrate low achievement scores on college admissions tests, in comparison to non-first-generation college students, and (d) first-generation college students choose other educational or work opportunities (e.g. community college, vocational/trade school, military) over attending a four-year college (Adelman, 1999; Choy, 2001; Striplin, 1999; Thayer, 2000; Tym, McMillion, & Webster, 2004).

“Access to higher education is increasingly difficult for lower-income families; yet, a college degree is more important than ever in today's global economy” (Zuekle, 2008, p. 2). By the year 2020, the United States may encounter a shortage of up to 14 million workers who possess college-level skills. On a related note, Zuekle (2008) declared that some postsecondary education was a prerequisite for 22 of the 30 fastest-growing career fields in the nation. Despite these challenges, the current outlook within the field of education is a positive message of access and opportunity for all students, in that no student should be forced or intimidated into attending college, but that every student should be encouraged to explore the option. Pike and Kuh would agree that “some form of postsecondary education is now within reach of virtually everyone in the U.S.” However, they cautioned, “...not all students were equally likely to succeed. (2005, p. 292)” First-generation students, those whose parents have not earned a post-secondary degree, often find the challenge to complete college to be more significant, as compared to students who were raised in college-educated families (Choy, 2001; Engle, 2007).

Understanding this high-risk population is a crucial issue for educators and policymakers (Jenkins, Miyazaki, & Janosik, 2009).

### **First-Generation Students and Financial Barriers**

The amount of saving for college is associated with parents' own socioeconomic status. Miller (1997) noted that two-thirds of low-income parents had saved little—10 % or less of their children's total college educational costs. Miller also found that most low-income parents expected to finance college education through financial aid, instead of through their own resources. Moreover, family reliance on financial aid tended to vary in direct proportion to family income. Of additional concern was that low-income parents were more likely to expect to go into debt to finance their children's college education than were upper-income parents (65 % versus 40 %, respectively). The U.S. Department of Education examined the financial preparation of the parents of students in grades six to twelve; they found that 81% of families with a household income of over \$75,000 believed they had enough information about college costs to begin planning; whereas, only 49% of families with a household income of under \$25,000 felt prepared (Schmidt, 2008).

### **First-Generation Students and Academic Barriers**

Warburton, Bugarin, and Nunez (2001) found that college-entrance examinations were taken less often by first-generation students and, when taken, appeared to pose greater difficulty for them. Of those who completed an exam, 40% of first-generation students in their study scored in the lowest quartile, compared with 15% of students from college-educated families. Using high school transcript data, Xianglei (2005),

determined that first-generation students were less likely to enter college with adequate academic preparation. Students in this study had completed less advanced math courses, had lower entrance exam scores, and produced lower achievement test scores. As a result, 55% of first-generation students' college transcripts showed that they had completed remedial coursework, compared with 27% of students whose parents completed college.

### **First-Generation Students and Social Barriers**

First-generation status is found to occupy “a central place in one's sense of self, especially as it occurs on college campuses when the majority of the student population is presumed to come from more-educated families” (Orbe, 2008, p. 87). Fitting into the category of first-generation college student may carry a negative connotation.

Publicizing this attribute can worry some students, who fear being perceived as “ill-prepared for college-level academics, without substantial educational aspirations, socially or communicatively inept, and less committed to participating fully in the learning process” (Orbe, 2008, p. 92). Institutions of higher education are places laden with class-inflicted perspectives, and the inherently important higher-class ideals of empowerment and prestige can, themselves, intimidate first-generation students (Casey, 2005).

Lubrano coined the term “straddlers” for those from a blue-collar heritage, having “one foot in the working class, the other in the middle class...at home in neither worlds, living a limbo life” (2004, p. 8). Tension can mount between them and their families at home as their new attitudes and ideas, styles of clothing, political views, and interests clash with the values and beliefs they previously espoused (London, 1996). Even their

love and allegiance to the family can come into question. Students are in a constant state of negotiating between their two “worlds” as they experience the passage into the middle class (London, 1996).

FGCS are more likely to arrive at college with more emotional and psychological challenges that impact their likelihood of college persistence than their more traditional peers. Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella and Nora (1995) maintained that first-generation freshmen were more likely to “come to college facing a number of psychological and emotional obstacles, including anxiety about their ability to succeed and stressful changes in their relations with family and friends” (p. 12). They tended to be more anxious and face more stressors because of worries about their ability to succeed academically. They also worried about whether or not they were going to fit in socially at college. Unlike their college peers with college-educated parents, FGCS have no blueprint for what to expect when they enter college and concerns about this unknown creates emotional stress for many of them. The same study found that FGCS received less encouragement from their parents to attend college. Some FGCS are also emotionally fragile because of the potential threat of interpersonal changes that may emerge in their relationships with their friends and family as a result of the transformational nature of their college experiences.

In one of the rare qualitative studies of first-generation students, the most common theme found in open-ended interviews was that adaptation to college was far more difficult for non-traditional, first-generation college students (Terenzini, Rendon, Upcraft, Millar, Allison, Gregg, & Jalomo, 1994). They found that:



For many, going to college constituted a major disjunction in their life course. Those who were the first in their immediate family to attend college were breaking, not continuing family tradition ....going to college often constituted a significant and intimidating cultural transition for the first- generation student in our study (Terenzini, et al., 1994, p. 63).

### **Cultural Capital**

First-generation students suffer more from class-based structural challenges than their continuing-generation peers; “first-generation students don't start college with the same advantages as their continuing-generation peers” (Somers, Woodhouse, & Cofer, 2004, p. 429). Terenzini et al., (1994) based their analysis of first-generation students partly on the theoretical framework of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1973) and his concept of *cultural capital*. Bourdieu maintained that the children of college-educated parents received certain cultural advantages from their parents through the process of socialization and that these built-in advantages that were the result of the family's higher levels of education and socioeconomic status spilled over into subtle advantages that they also received within the larger culture, including college. Cultural capital provides certain groups with social advantages and other, less fortunate groups, with social burdens that they must overcome in order for them to achieve upward social mobility. According to Bourdieu, these advantages helped to account for the social reproduction of society and to explain why it was so difficult for many people from disadvantaged circumstances to overcome the limitations of birth. Examples of cultural capital include specific characteristics that students acquire through the socialization

process, such as a more complex speech pattern, an expanded vocabulary, an upper middle-class style of dress and manners, and a superior knowledge of the both the culture and norms of higher education. Continuing-generation students also possess the advantage of anticipatory socialization as the result of their parents preparing them for the transition to college, based on their own personal experiences as college students. Continuing-generation students are more confident and less fearful entering college because they are not entering the unknown, unlike many of the first-generation students.

These advantages of birth represent a form of social capital that allow these continuing generation college students better access to both human and cultural resources, including a more meaningful college educational experience. They simply get more out of the college experience than first-generation students. In this sense, the first-generation college student is at a cultural disadvantage and may lack the capacity to make informed decisions about their college experience, not only in terms of academic choices, but also in terms of social relationships on campus. For the children of college-educated parents, attending college is the continuation of a family tradition that their families have prepared them for; but, for first-generation students, college constitutes new territory for which many have no cognitive map.

Although income is often cited, income alone does not provide a definitive index of the total resources available to a particular student (Adelman, 1999). Coleman (1988) described the concept of social capital as the complete picture of resources that were obtainable within the family and community's social structure. This extended beyond the family's annual income and included social networks, norms, and interpersonal

relationships, as they, too, contributed to one's attainment and personal development. Bourdieu's (1973) interpretation of social and cultural capital also included the attitudes, competencies, behaviors, and inclinations that were associated with a particular rung of the socioeconomic ladder. Socioeconomic status implies the measures of social and cultural capital, along with actual household income (Terenzini, Cabrera, & Bernal, 2001).

Students from first-generation families—the network of grandparents, parents, and siblings in which one of its members is in the process of becoming the first to pursue a college education—may receive strong parental encouragement regarding college, yet have limited means of support. College-educated parents tend to be more knowledgeable than low-income parents regarding financial aid; and, this not only entails the different types of financial aid programs available, but also the qualification criteria (Olson, & Rosenfeld, 1984). Olson and Rosenfeld's research also confirmed that parents' understanding of available options increased the most when they employed a variety of information-seeking strategies, including consulting with high school guidance counselors and bank loan officers, as well as perusing a variety of pamphlets and books about college financing. Leslie, Johnson, and Carlson (1977) similarly found that higher-socioeconomic status parents accessed a variety of information sources, including other parents, students, catalogs, college representatives, and even private guidance counselors. In contrast, low-socioeconomic-status students were more likely to become reliant upon high school counselors as the single most consulted source of information about college (Leslie, Johnson, & Carlson, 1977). When parents lack firsthand “college knowledge”

and had limited financial and social resources, they consequently had a lessened capacity to facilitate college planning (Thayer, 2000; Choy, 2001; Oliverez & Tierney, 2005; Ceja, 2006).

Preparation for college involves the dimensions of academic preparation, emotional preparation, and cultural preparation. Without preparation in these areas, students—particularly first-generation students (Choy, 2001)—may be categorized as *at-risk* of failing to complete the program in which they enroll. Choy (2001) delineated these dimensions by describing that academic under-preparation involved low high school grade point averages, selection of more basic coursework during high school, or dealing with an untreated learning disability. Emotional under-preparation involved low self-esteem about oneself or one's skills, relationship problems, or substance abuse issues. Cultural under-preparation is another common factor for first-generation students and implies a situation of coming from a low-income family, a family that places low value on education or believes it to be unattainable, or perhaps, from a family that represents a minority culture (Choy, 2001).

### **First-year Persistence: A Benchmark for Retention Research**

Ubiquitous research of student retention knowledge corroborates that the first year is the most critical *for any college student* because the greatest rate of attrition occurs between the first and second years (Astin, 1993, Berkner, He, & Cataldi, 2002, Reason, Terenzini, & Domingo, 2006; Tinto, 1993). On average, 32% of all first-year students drop out before beginning the second year of higher education—a retention rate of 68% (ACT, 2005); by 2010, that number increased to 33% —a retention rate of 67% (ACT,

2010). From 2005 to 2010, the average first to second year retention rate among four-year public universities increased by only 1.2 percentage points—from 66% to 68%, respectively (ACT, 2010). During the same period, the average first-to-second-year retention rate among four-year privates decreased by 2.2 percentage points (ACT, 2010). Retention rates have been even lower for under-represented students, including first-generation and low-income students (Terenzini, Cabrera & Bernal, 2001).

Although the literature on student retention in higher education is extensive and provides guidance for student success and persistence in regards to the first-year (ACT, 2005; ACT, 2010, Kuh, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Porter, 2001; Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2004), much still remains unexplained about the first-year persistence issues of an increasingly diverse student body population in United States colleges and universities. Moreover, only recently has first-year retention research focused on first-generation college students.

### **Major Models for Retention Studies**

The etiology of explanatory models of student retention theory clearly point to the work of Spady (1970), who used Durkheim's (1961) theory on suicide to illuminate issues of student retention. Durkheim believed that breaking one's ties with society (suicide) stemmed from a lack of integration into the common life of that society. Spady's (1970) model focused mainly on the student's interaction with and the integration into his or her environment. Spady (1970) stated: "The interaction that results provides the student with the opportunity of assimilating successfully into both the academic and social systems of the college" (p. 77). Spady (1970) predicted that

withdrawal would occur when the student perceived insufficient rewards within either the social or academic systems.

From this seminal work emerged the major theories of student retention that are widely accepted in the present day to explain how a student's decision to persist in college is predicated on his or her interactions linked with the college environment. The majority of studies conducted on student retention in higher education have used one or more of the following three explanatory models: Astin's model of student involvement (1984), Bean's student attrition model (1985), and Tinto's student departure model (1993). These three dominant models use integration theory to explain student departure. Social integration theory, which emphasizes the significance of a student's academic and institutional fit and commitment, contends that students need to be engaged, connected, and involved in order to achieve positive student outcomes and persistence (Astin, 1984, 1993; Bean, 1985, Tinto, 1993).

In his book, *Leaving College*, Tinto (1975) was the first to lay out a detailed longitudinal model that made explicit connections between environments—in this case the academic and social systems of the institution—to include the individuals who shaped those systems and student retention over different periods of time (Tinto, 1975, 1987). Central to Tinto's model was the concept of integration and the patterns of interaction between the student and other members of the institution, especially during the critical first year of college and the stages of transition that marked that year. This early work on student retention ushered in what has been termed *the age of involvement* (Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in Higher Education, 1984). Ancillary research, by

Alexander Astin, Ernest Pascarella, and Patrick Terenzini, served to reinforce the importance of student contact or involvement to a range of student outcomes—not the least of which was student retention (Astin, 1975, 1984; Endo & Harpel, 1982; Pascarella, 1980; Pascarella & Chapman, 1983; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980; Terenzini, Lorang, & Pascarella, 1981).

Like any early body of work, the study of student retention lacked complexity and detail. Much of the early work was drawn from quantitative studies of, largely, residential universities and students of majority backgrounds. As such, it did not, in its initial formulation, speak to the experience of students in different types of institutions, nor of students of different gender, race, ethnicity, income, and orientation.

### **Emergent Views on Retention Research**

The study and practice of student retention has undergone a number of changes. First, our understanding of the experience of students of different backgrounds has been greatly enhanced (Allen, 1992; Bennett & Okinaka, 1990; Clewell & Ficklen, 1986; Fleming, 1985; Hernandez, 2000; Hurtado, 1994; Hurtado & Carter, 1996; Johnson, et al. 2004-2005; Murguia, Padilla, & Pavel, 1991; Nora, 1987; Rendon, 1994; Richardson, 1987; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Thayer, 2000; Thompson & Fretz, 1991; Torres, 2003; Zurita, 2005) as has our appreciation of how a broader array of forces, cultural, economic, social, and institutional shape student retention (Berger, 2001; Braxton, Bray, & Berger, 2000; Christie & Dinham, 1991; Herndon, 1984; St. John, Cabrera, Nora, & Asker, 2000).

Take, for instance, the research on the retention of under-represented students and the so-called stages of student departure (Tinto, 1988). Where it was once argued that persistence obliged students to break away from past communities, researchers came to agree that, for many students, the ability to remain connected to their past communities, family, church, or tribe was essential to their persistence (Attinasi, 1989; London, 1989; Nora, 2001; Terenzini, Rendon, Upcraft, Millar, Allison, Gregg, & Jalomo, 1994; Tierney, 1992; Torres, 2003; Waterman, 2004).

In addition, emergent research has exposed how the process of student retention differs in various institutional settings: residential, non-residential, two-year, and four-year (Allen, 1992; Borglum & Kubala, 2000; Pascarella & Chapman, 1983; Pascarella, Smart & Ethington, 1986; Tinto, Russo, & Kadel, 1994). Persistence research focused toward non-residential settings, for instance, gives educators in higher education an enhanced appreciation, not only for the impact of external events on students' lives, but also for the importance of involvement in the classroom to student affect retention, (Tinto 1997; Tinto, Russo, & Kadel, 1994). This is the case because the classroom, for many students, is the one, and perhaps only place, where they meet each other and the faculty. If involvement does not occur there, it is unlikely to occur elsewhere.

Further, though the wealth of retention research has uncovered more and more about the complexity of student retention, researchers now accept the limited scope of earlier models of retention. The body of retention research now includes a range of models—some sociological, some psychological, and others economic in nature—proposed to be better suited to the task of explaining student leaving (Bean, 1980;



Braxton & Brier, 1989; Cabrera, Castaneda, Nora, & Hengstler, 1992; Braxton & Hirschy, 2005; Nora, 2001; Tierney, 2000; Tinto, 1993, 2005). Indeed, there are now several edited volumes dedicated solely to comparing these models and exploring possible alternatives (Braxton, 2000; Seidman, 2005).

Throughout these changes and the advancement of alternative models, one fact has remained clear: *involvement*—or what is increasingly being referred to as *engagement*—matters, and it matters most during the critical first year of college (Tinto, 2001; Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2004). What has been less clear is how to make involvement occur; that is to say, how to make it happen in different settings (e.g., non-residential, private, or religiously-affiliated) and for differing students (e.g., commuters, community colleges, minorities, or first-generation) in ways that enhance retention and graduation. Awareness of the gap between research and practice, together with the challenges of declining enrollments and budgets has motivated higher education administrators to a heightened focus on *what works*.

### **Tinto's Explanatory Model of Retention**

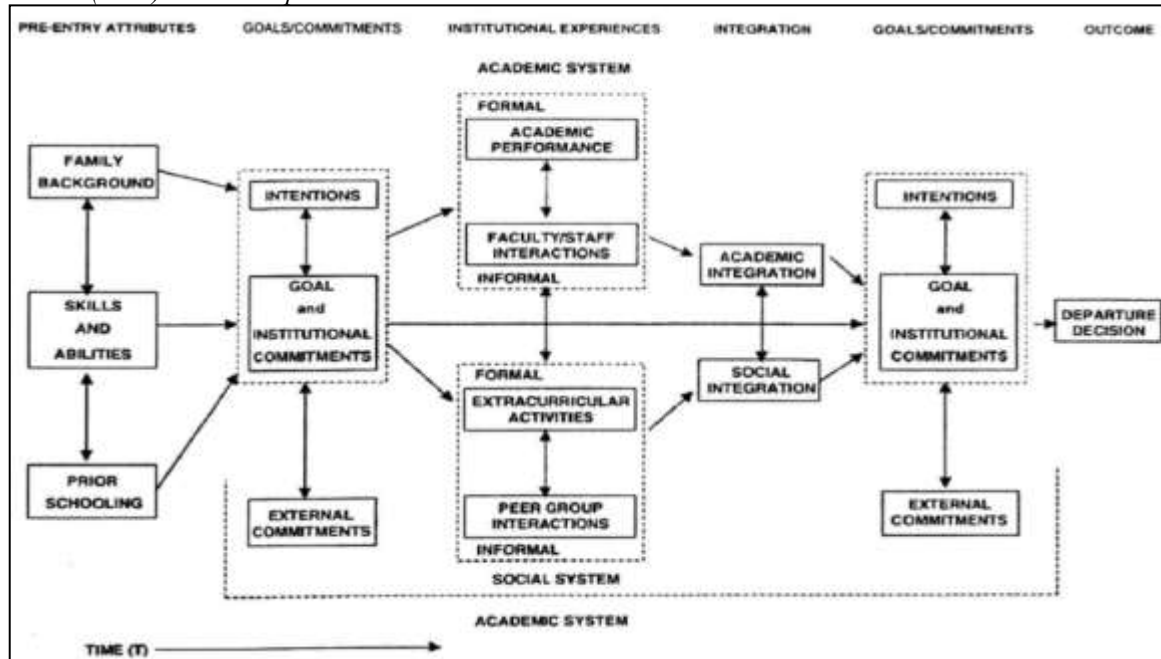
Tinto's student departure model (1993)—the model framing this study—supports the assumption that student involvement promotes positive student outcomes. Tinto's model of student departure gained widespread attention when he elaborated on Spady's (1970) seminal theory, applied it to four-year students in residential settings, and added a longitudinal time element to the paradigm. Tinto's (1993) model explores the relationship between academic and social integration and college student persistence. Tinto's 1993 model, a revision of his initial 1975 model, details the interaction between

students' behavior and perceptions with the integration of their social and academic environments.

The congruency between the student and the institution is what Tinto referred to as *institutional fit*. The dynamic interaction of the constructs of Tinto's (1993) model (Figure 2.1) provides a graphic explanation for the process behind why some students may leave their chosen institution prior to degree completion. The central proposition of Tinto's theory is that students bring to college various pre-entry attributes that interact with—as well as integrate into—the academic and social systems of the institution (1993). Tinto's departure model (1993) proposes these interactions lead either to positive (*integrative*) experiences that heighten intentions and commitments to the institution or to negative (*malintegrative*) experiences that weaken intentions and commitment to the institution.

One conspicuous deficiency in retention literature, in general, however, has been the lack of research which examines retention and attrition at private, faith-based institutions of higher education. Only a small handful of peer-reviewed studies were available in educational databases that applied Tinto's core constructs to students in a single, faith-based institutional setting. Moreover, only one study was found which specifically looked at academic and social integration of first-generation, high-risk students in the private faith-based setting—and that study was longitudinal and quantitative.

Figure 2.1  
Tinto's (1993) Student Departure Model



### Tinto's Theoretical Framework

Tinto organizes the constructs of his model into five chronological categories that lead to a departure decision. In the first category are student pre-entry attributes, including family background, skills and abilities, and prior schooling. Accordingly, the student also has entering intentions, which Tinto qualifies as (*initial*) goals and commitments. Tinto stated, "Intentions or goals specify both the level and type of education and occupation desired by the individual. Commitments indicate the degree to which individuals are committed both to the attainment of those goals (*goal commitment*) and to the institution into which they gain entry (*institutional goals*)" (p. 115). Additionally, students' persistence is affected by their own unique external commitments,

or outside issues and demands, that can influence departure decisions—for example, financial aid.

The goals and commitments, along with pre-entry attributes are carried into the institutional setting to interact with the model's next category—institutional experiences). Tinto's (1993) model divides institutional experiences into variables relating to the academic system and the social system. Within the academic system, the student's academic performance (*formal*) and interaction with campus faculty and staff (*informal*) lead to either positive experiences that enable integration into the intellectual community, or negative experiences that could lead to feelings of isolation for the student. Similarly, the social system forms a dichotomy of the student's involvement in formal extracurricular activities and informal peer-group interactions which lead either to positive experiences and integration congruence or negative experiences that could leave the student with feelings of dissonance. The academic and social integration question would be the subject matter of the next category of variables—*integration*.

If the student's experiences in the academic and social spheres of the institution are positive, then the student's initial goals and commitments are reinforced and impact Tinto's next category of variables—goals and commitment (*subsequent*), by strengthening the student's departure decision. When academic and social experiences are negative, the impact weakens the student's goals and commitments (*subsequent*) and a decision to leave the institution is more likely (Tinto, 1993). The decision to stay or depart from the institution becomes the final category in Tinto's model—labeled *outcome*.

Tinto's theoretical framework stresses both the cognitive and non-cognitive experiences that students encounter after they arrived at college. Tinto (1990, p. 44) maintained that “the practical route to successful retention lies in those programs that ensure, from the very outset of student contact with the institution, that entering students are integrated into the social and academic communities of the college.” The Tinto model (1993) is predicated on the hypothesis that student attrition is based on a poor environmental fit, either academically and/or socially—between the student and the institution. In this model, the primary approach to student retention is based on the development of various campus interventions and efforts designed to bond the students both academically and socially to the school after they arrived on campus. Students can bond to the institution in a variety of ways. They could develop important personal relationships at the school with faculty, staff members, or peers. They could become attached to their particular area of study or identify with the reputation of the institution, or even successful athletic programs. Tinto maintained that if they failed to develop some form of emotional attachment to the school, students would depart from the institution.

### **Empirical Support for Tinto’s Model**

In their meta-analysis, Braxton, Sullivan, and Johnson (1997) examined peer-reviewed studies spanning a 30-year period that tested specific elements of Tinto’s model. In total, twenty multi-institutional and thirty-nine single-institutional tests were made to evaluate the direct influence of academic and social integration on student departure decisions. Braxton, et al. (1997) derived 13 testable propositions from Tinto’s

model and assessed the level of support for each of the propositions (Figure 2.2). These researchers rated support based on the following criteria: “*strong*” (S), if 66% of the tests for a given proposition proved to be statistically significant, “*moderate*” (M), if between 34% and 65% of tests for a given proposition were statistically significant, and “*weak*” (W), if 33 % or less of the tests for a given proposition were statistically significant; “*no support*” (N) indicated that no tests produced a statistically significant result for a given proposition. Results appear in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1  
*Aggregate Magnitude of Support for Tinto’s Student Departure Model*

Proposition	Multiple	Single
1. Student entry characteristics affect the level of initial commitment to the institution.	M	S
2. Student entry characteristics affect the level of initial commitment to the goal of graduation from college.	S	M
3. Student entry characteristics directly affect the student’s likelihood of persistence in college.	M	W
4. Initial commitment to the goal of graduation from college affects the level of academic integration.	W	M
5. Initial commitment to the goal of graduation from college affects the level of social integration.	N	M
6. Initial commitment to the institution affects the level of social integration.	W	W
7. Initial commitment to the institution affects the level of academic integration.	W	W
8. The greater the level of academic integration, the greater the level of subsequent commitment to the goal of graduation from college.	M	M
9. The greater the level of social integration, the greater the level of subsequent commitment to the institution.	M	S
10. The initial level of institutional commitment affects the subsequent level of institutional commitments.	S	S
11. The initial level of commitment to the goal of graduation from college affects the subsequent level of commitment to the goal of graduation from college.	S	S
12. The greater the level of subsequent commitment to the goal of college graduation, the greater the likelihood of student persistence in college	S	W
13. The greater the level of subsequent commitment to the institution, the greater the likelihood of student persistence in college.	M	S

Aggregate results for rated studies conducted across multiple institutions demonstrated that for nine of the thirteen propositions, 69% demonstrated moderate or strong support. Similar results were recognized among the ratings of studies conducted at single institutions, as 69% of the propositions indicated moderate or strong support; however the comparative ratings by proposition were different. Two of the propositions collected a “strong” rating at both multiple and single institutions, drawing confirmation for Tinto’s conjecture that (a) the greater the students’ level of academic integration, the greater the students’ level of subsequent commitment to the goal of graduation, and (b) the greater the students’ level of social integration, the greater the students’ subsequent commitment to the institution.

When testing the propositions among single-institution studies, the following Tinto components received a strong rating: (a) student academic integration is positively correlated with greater subsequent commitment to the goal of graduation, (b) student social integration is positively correlated with subsequent commitment to the institution, (c) initial institutional commitment is positively correlated with subsequent level of institutional commitment, and (d) subsequent commitment to the institution is positively correlated with the likelihood of persistence.

In summary, this extensive analysis demonstrated strong support among Tinto’s peers for the efficacy of the major components of his student departure theory for student retention.

### **Tinto Model: First-Generation Minority Students**

Rendon, Jalomo, and Nora (2000) provided a critical analysis of Tinto's model of student departure (1975, 1987, & 1993) with a specific focus on the separation and transition state. Tinto's model has been extensively employed to study how majority and minority students become academically and socially integrated into (*postsecondary*) institutional life. These researchers considered how the perspectives and assumptions of the Tinto model generalized to the study of minority college-student retention—a majority of who were first-generation in college—given that one of the assumptions to be made was that individuals should disassociate themselves from native cultural realities in order to assimilate into college life. Tinto's (1987) student departure model was criticized for promoting assimilation into the dominant culture (Rendon, et al., 2000) and for focusing only on the individualistic level, rather than on the collective level, that is important to many minority students (Tierney, 1992).

In his second edition, Tinto (1993) acknowledged these critiques and focused on membership, rather than integration, as a way to clarify issues raised about conformity and assimilation (Hurtado & Carter, 1996). In Tinto's (1993) revised model, he argued that the majority of colleges were made up of several, if not many, communities or *subcultures* and that rather than conforming to one dominant culture in order to persist, students would need only to have located at least one community in which to find membership and support. While Rendon, et al. (2000) recognized the contribution of Tinto's model of academic and social integration in forming the foundation for the study of student persistence, they also posited that “Much more work needs to be done to



uncover race, class and gender...that impact retention for diverse students in diverse institutions” (p. 151)

### **Tinto Model: Religiously Affiliated Institutions**

An early examination of Tinto’s theory within the setting of a private institution was conducted by Cash and Bissel (1985). They sought to examine his model within the context of two small, church-related institutions, each with a student population of less than 2,000 students. The goal of these researchers was to examine the portion of Tinto’s theory dealing with individual commitment, speculating this portion of Tinto’s model may have greater significance within the context of church-related institutions, since students who attended these types of colleges often paid significantly more money in tuition and fees than did students attending larger, public universities. Based on their data analysis, Cash and Bissel determined that the portion of Tinto’s theory dealing with individual commitment was applicable to the church-related institution, but that other factors may also have influenced departure.

Research of Astin (1984) and Tinto (1987) was also used as the conceptual framework for a study by Burks and Barrett (2009). Their study was designed to examine factors that influenced the intentions of students to persist from their freshmen to sophomore year in private, religiously affiliated, four-year institutions. This cross-sectional study analyzed data obtained from 27 religiously affiliated institutions that participated in the 2003 *Your First College year survey* (YFCY) administered by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at University of Southern California (UCLA). Variables associated with academic and social integration found to correlate

with increased persistence were; male gender, attendance at religious services, attendance at classes or labs, living off campus, joining a fraternity or sorority, and self-reported positive experiences with faculty-to-student interaction.

The research of Patten and Rice (2009) was motivated by what they perceived as the scanty availability among retention literature for research into the experiences of the religious minority enrolled in religiously-affiliated colleges and universities. Their explanatory study analyzed one conservative, private, religiously-affiliated university and the persistence rates of both the religious majority and religious minority. Crosstab and chi-square analyses of the survey data indicated a significant difference in persistence from the freshmen to sophomore year between college students who identified with the universities' religion affiliation, as opposed to those students who did not self-align with the school's religious culture.

The work of Morris, Smith, and Cejda, 2003 used a survey methodology to test three core constructs of Tinto's (1993) model of student departure within the context of a single Christian college. Their research added a spiritual integration variable to Tinto's model, anticipating its potential to better explain retention and attrition at Christian colleges and universities. Their survey findings, related to the spiritual integration variable, indicated that the construct of spiritual integration was a significant predictor of freshman-to-sophomore persistence at an institution of Christian higher education.

### **Academic and Social Integration of First-Generation Students**

Integration within the college community can be a complicated and sometimes daunting experience for many college freshmen, but especially for first-generation

students, who may perceive the college environment as being less supportive of them than for continuing-generation students (Pike & Kuh, 2005). Factors such as lower educational aspirations and living off campus have been related to lower levels of academic and social engagement during the first year of college (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998), and first-generation students often fall into one or both of these categories (Choy, 2001). They may fear the prospect of failing more than students whose parents attended college (Bui, 2002) and sense the need to commit more time and energy to studying, feeling less-prepared for various facets of the college experience (Oliverrez & Tierney, 2005). In addition, first-generation students typically shy away from asking questions or seeking assistance from college faculty members (Jenkins, Miyazaki, & Janosik, 2009)—creating a further barrier for integration.

The work of Pike and Kuh (2005) addressed the importance of understanding the academic and social integration needs of first-generation college students. In one study, Pike and Kuh focused on the following question: Why were first-generation college students not involved in their college environment? These researchers discovered that “first-generation students were less engaged overall and less likely to successfully integrate diverse college experiences; they perceived the college environment as less supportive, and reported making less progress in their learning and intellectual development” (p. 289).

Filkins and Doyle (2002) studied the differences in academic and social engagement of college students who participated in a TRIO program versus students who were not in a TRIO program. TRIO is not an acronym—rather it refers to a number of

US federal programs to increase access to higher education for economically disadvantaged students programs, including first-generation and low-income college students, and to help them succeed in college. The main purpose of the study was to “assess the impact of good educational practices on the educational and personal development of first-generation and low-income students (TRIO eligible students)” (p. 9). The researchers gathered data from the *2001 National Survey of Student Engagement* (NSSE), a survey that measures students’ participation in educationally purposeful activities and how they are relate to college outcomes. The dataset included over 175,000 first-year students who attended more than 300 four-year colleges and universities.

The first of Filkins and Doyle's (2002) findings was that “their (first-generation college students) engagement in such educational practices (e.g., involvement in active/collaborative learning activities and interacting with faculty) was positively related to their cognitive and affective growth during college” (p. 14). Their second major finding was that “low income, first generation students tend to benefit more from educational practices that involve them in activities such as class presentations or participation in class discussions, as well as activities that engage them in a collaborative learning process” (pp. 14-15).

To examine why first-generation college students were not as academically successful compared with non-first-generation college students, Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella and Nora (1996) completed a longitudinal study included within the *National Study of Student Learning* (NSSL). The study compared first-generation college students to non-first-generation college students at 23 different institutions on pre-college

characteristics and aspects of their college experience (e.g., hours studying or perception of faculty members). Terenzini, et al. studied 825 participants who identified themselves as *first-generation* and 1,860 who identified themselves as *non-first-generation* students. Participants provided demographic information, academic proficiency, and information regarding first-year experiences in college. Terenzini, et al. noted that the first-generation college students “reported fewer hours studying, probably because they continued to spend more hours working off-campus and were less likely to perceive faculty members as concerned with students’ development and teaching” than non-first-generation college students. They were also less likely than their counterparts to attend student success workshops (p. 13).

More recently, Strayhorn (2006) completed a study that was very similar in nature to the Terenzini, et al. (1995) study. Strayhorn examined various factors known to influence the academic achievement of first-generation college students. Using a theoretical model based upon a college impact model developed by Terenzini, et al. (1996), Strayhorn’s study utilized data from the 1993/1997 *Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study* conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics. The sample contained a predominantly female sample of over one million students with a mean age of 18.57. The dependent variable for the study was college grade point average (GPA). The independent variables for the study represented various demographic characteristics, pre-college characteristics, and first-generation status. Their results showed that regarding demographic characteristics, only 5% of the variance of college GPA could be explained. When pre-college factors (e.g., time between high school and

college, attendance at a two-year institution, ACT score, and SAT score) were considered into the model, an additional 17% of the variance of college GPA was explained. Finally, when first-generation status was entered into the model, there was a very small effect size on college GPA.

Dennis, Phinney, and Chuateco (2005) conducted a single-campus study aimed to address the void of literature that examined the possibility of additional challenges facing first-generation college students from non-white ethnic backgrounds. In particular, the study aimed to investigate the extent to which the students' personal characteristics, specifically, their motivations to attend college, and contextual factors—namely, how the availability of social support from family and peers—influenced college outcomes (e.g., college GPA) over and above the effects of these background characteristics. A sample of 100 students was used for this study; 84 were identified as Latino and 16 Asian. The students were enrolled at an urban commuter university located on the west coast of the United States. The sampling of students for this study was representative of the ethnic student population that attended this institution. The researchers developed a longitudinal study that addressed motivation, parental support, and peer support of college students. The longitudinal survey collected data including high school GPA, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, social support, parental support, career motivation, and peer support. Dennis, et al. (2005) determined that the only significant determinants of cumulative college GPA were high school GPA and the amount of support students received from peers.

Warburton, Bugarin and Nunez (2001) examined the presence of significant differences between first-generation college students and non-first-generation college students' postsecondary GPAs, persistence, and number of remedial courses taken. Warburton, et al. used data from the *1995-1996 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study*, which was also part of the *National Postsecondary Student Aid Study* (NPSAS). Drawing upon 830 institutions from across the nation, the NPSAS sampled 44,500 undergraduates, 8,700 graduates, and 2,500 students described as *first-professional*. Warburton, et al. ascertained that “postsecondary enrollment and academic achievement confirmed previous research showing differential behaviors between first-generation students and their peers whose parents were college educated” (p. 9). Specifically, first-generation college students had a lower first-year GPA (2.6) than non-first-generation college students, and were more likely to have taken a remedial course during their first year in college. Further, Warburton, et al. noted that “of the students who attended four-year institutions, first-generation students were much more likely to attend public comprehensive institutions instead of research universities than those with at least one parent who had a bachelor's degree (41 % versus 26 %)” (p. 4).

In another study of first-generation college students in postsecondary education, Chen (2005) found that non-first-generation college students performed better than first-generation students in the first year of college, and posted higher grade point averages. In comparison to non-first-generation college students, first-generation students were more likely to be enrolled in remedial courses, had greater difficulty in selecting an undergraduate major, earned fewer credits, and were under-represented in mathematics

and science courses. Chen also found that first-generation college students performed weaker, academically, than non-first-generation college students in certain academic majors—specifically, in the fields of mathematics, science, computer science, foreign languages, and history. They concluded that first-generation college students who were in these academic disciplines were less academically successful than other first-generation students who enrolled in other disciplines. Based on previous research indicating that one of the main motivations for first-generation college students attending college was to gain access to better career options, Chen theorized that first-generation students who were in academic fields with more direct connections to employment opportunities tended to perform better—academically. Chen posited this finding to suggest that further research needed to focus on the relationship between the academic disciplines of first-generation college students and their overall academic success.

### **Financial Concerns and Persistence of First-Generation Students**

An *ACT policy report* (Lotkrowski, Bobbins, & Noeth, 2004) found a direct positive correlation between college persistence and a student's level of financial support, networking, institutional fit, and social involvement. The study cited that first-generation students often had weaker family and peer support systems and lacked a sense of belonging to their institution, referred to as “institutional fit” (Tinto, 1993). This sense of belonging was linked to greater academic success (Gandara & Bial, 2001); however, a failure to securely bond with an institution could push away individuals who were already unsure of whether postsecondary aspirations were right for them (Tinto, 1993).



First-generation college students are more likely to face financial problems and come from homes with household incomes that are significantly lower than those of non-first-generation students, according to Jenkins, Miyazaki, and Janosik (2009). As a result, their families have a greater tendency to worry about financial aspects of attending college (Bui, 2002). Unfortunately, first-generation families are often unsure about how to handle the process of acquiring post-secondary education financing, voiced McDonough (1997). Some first-generation students claim to feel guilty about pursuing higher education while their families struggle financially (Piorkowski, 1983), even to the extent of feeling obligated to help meet the financial needs of their families while in college (Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora (2000). These financial pressures often present barriers to the college enrollment process (Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora (2000)—concluding that perceptions regarding access to financial aid directly shape postsecondary plans among low-income high school students.

For some students, availability of financial aid has a greater influence on eventual enrollment decision-making than the cost of tuition (St. John & Somers, 1993). For example, research by Horn and Berktold (1998) using data from *the 1995-1996 National Post-Secondary Aid Study* indicated that 79% of all undergraduate students enrolled in United States colleges and universities during this time frame worked during their postsecondary experience—presumably, to defray school-related cost. Half of the students reported working as a means of paying their tuition. These students considered themselves “students who work,” while 29% of students were primarily employees who were also taking classes and considered themselves to be “employees who studied.” The

working-borrowing fiscal relationship for students posed a subtle, but potentially significant policy issue (Terenzini, Cabrera, & Bernal, 2001).

Responding to these findings, Horn and Berktold (1998) stated: “While borrowing results in debt that must be repaid when students finish their postsecondary education, choosing to work intensively in lieu of any borrowing may increase a student’s chance of not finishing his or her degree” (p. 25). Because time is a finite commodity, the more hours a student works, the fewer hours they have available for school-related activities that affect both academic and social integration. This, in turn, has been associated not only with persistence and degree completion, but also with cognitive, psycho-social, and attitudinal and value change and development (Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991). Working 35 or more hours per week was found in a related study to have a negative impact on degree completion for college students (Cuccaro-Alamin & Choy, 1998). The degree of student employment was also identified by Horn and Berktold (1998) to be linked to persistence.

An institution's level of financial aid package has been found to have a positive impact on the enrollment decisions of college applicants. In a study by Braunstein, McGrath, and Pescatrice (1999), the probability of enrollment increased between 1.1% and 2.5% for every \$1,000 increase in the financial aid offered. Specifically, low-income students were likely to be more responsive to grants than to work study or student loans (St. John & Somers, 1993). “The availability of funds to meet tuition and other college-going expenses not only bears on a student's decision to attend college but also affects, to

a great extent, the choice of college made by that student” (Nora, Barlow, & Crisp, 2006, p. 1636).

The availability of financial aid has been considered a pivotal predictor of degree completion, impacting the likelihood of persistence for low-income college students (Luan & Fenske, 2006). During their pursuit of college completion, greater proportions of first-generation students find it financially necessary to balance the demands of working 20 or more hours per week with the expectations of college coursework (Jenkins, Miyazaki, & Janosik, 2009).

### **Summary of Literature Review**

The literature regarding the first-generation student population strongly suggested that this group has needs and issues that require attention by both student affairs administrators and academic professionals. Core issues in examining first-generation college students included entering demographic characteristics of these students, cultural, social and academic challenges this student population faced before and during matriculation into higher education, retention, and success in higher education. In addition, campus involvement emerged as a strong contributor to numerous college outcomes and college success; yet, first-generation students were not as involved in their campus community as were their non-first-generation peers. In addition, first-generation students were found resistant to taking advantage of the student success outreach programs designed on behalf of high-risk students.

Tinto (2005) has suggested that successfully extrapolating reasons for *why students dropped out* did not necessarily leave retention problem solvers with an accurate

awareness for *why students chose to persist*, succeed, and graduate. In the world of retention, theories are only useful to the extent that they lead to qualified results; *what works is what matters*. Unfortunately, current theories of student attrition and persistence have inadequate utility to inform the task of shaping strategic planning measures.

Most current theories of student attrition typically utilize abstractions and variables that are often difficult to operationalize and translate into forms of effective institutional practice. Other common constructs defining current theory focus on matters that are not directly under the immediate ability of institutions to influence. For example, while theorists should be lauded for expounding awareness that academic and social integration figures significantly into the explanation of why students leave—their success is ephemeral without accompanying practical applications useful for directing and informing practitioners how to enable academic and social integration of the students in their particular settings.

Certainly, the work of Pace (1980), Astin (1984, 1993), and Kuh (1999, 2003, 2005) have done much to operationalize the core concept of academic and social integration in ways that could be reasonably measured and used for institutional assessment; however, this data falls short of advising institutions *how* they can enhance integration or what is now referred to as *engagement*. Additional studies by Tinto and Russo (1994), Tinto (1997), Zhao and Kuh (2004), and Whitt et al. (2005) looked into practices that enhanced academic and social integration; however, this body of work is incomplete.

This is an area of research that must be advanced, namely that we need to know more about the nature of the academic and social integration experiences of high-risk FGCS in a variety of settings—and the ways those experiences influence their persistence. Unfortunately, most institutions struggle to seize the wealth of knowledge available to them about the academic and social challenges faced by their students and turn it into strategic action plans that can influence their persistence. Why is this? The answer is not simple; the challenges institutions face are many and complex, and the pressures they feel to serve many different, often competing, ends is not trivial or easily dismissed.

Together with the experience of researchers and practitioners based on over four decades of work on student retention and additional in-depth qualitative inquiry at the individual level, we can further advance our progress toward answering this critical question. Specifically lacking is additional in-depth, qualitative research on the academic and social integration experiences affecting the persistence of first-generation students in small, private, faith-based settings and particularly in the Southeast, an area concentrated with first-generations students.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH DESIGN

This chapter restates the research problem and describes the rationale and design for the study. Also, it identifies the subjects to be studied and presents the data collection procedures that organize the research. In addition, this section addresses the ethical considerations and describes the data analysis protocols used in the study. There are numerous factors that must be included in the selection of a methodology such as the setting for the research, the goals of the study, and the nature of the subject matter. Each of these factors will be examined in further detail.

#### **Restatement of the Problem**

The overarching topic guiding the researcher's interest for the study is the problematic persistence of first-generation college students. First-generation college students comprise a substantial proportion of the entire college student population. Despite the increasing likelihood of college enrollment among students whose parents did not attend college, first-generation students are at higher risk of failure, as compared to their continuing-generation peers.

Unfortunately, and despite current student retention efforts, approximately one-half of all students entering college fail to obtain a four-year baccalaureate degree within six years of admission. "More students leave their college or university prior to degree completion than stay" (Tinto, 1993, p. 1). In particular, persistence seems to be a challenge for first-generation students, identified typically as the first in their family to complete a post-secondary degree. Although the literature on student attrition is

extensive, there appears to be a general lack of research consensus on the exact cause(s) of student departure. Most researchers agreed student persistence, or conversely, student attrition is a phenomenon based on multiple causes; however, abundant research from the literature review supported the significant role of *positive* academic and social integration experiences as influential elements associated with higher rates of student persistence. According to Tinto, students must be sufficiently involved on the college campus if an institution is to have a successful retention program. Of involvement, Tinto (1990) said:

Students are more likely to stay in schools that involve them as valued members of the institution. The frequency and quality of contact with faculty, staff and other students have repeatedly been shown to be independent predictors of student persistence (p. 5).

Tinto's (1993) model maintains that college persistence is based on the degree to which first-year students bond socially and academically with their colleges. Central to his model is the contention that college success is influenced more by what happens to students after they arrive on campus than what transpired prior to their arrival. Tinto's (1975) model of student departure describes personal environmental influences that weight students' successful integration into college. His student departure model is based on the premise that academic and social integration is essential to student retention. "Some degree of social and intellectual integration and therefore membership in academic and social communities must exist as a condition of continued persistence (Tinto, 1993, p. 120).

The retention literature presented clear evidence that factors affecting first-generation college students' integration into the college community differ from those affecting their counterparts. These internal and external influences, in turn, distinctly impact the academic and social integration experiences for all students—but especially for at-risk, first-generation students. The literature presented strong empirical support for Tinto's student departure model—that positive social and academic integration is unquestionably tied to student persistence. Much of the support, however, emerged from quantitative studies at large public institutions.

Research of a qualitative nature on Tinto's model, specifically, appeared to be underutilized as a framework to explain the influence of academic and social integration on student persistence for first-time, freshman, first-generation students in the private sector. In addition, qualitative literature on the application of Tinto's student departure model for this group within the specific context of the less-selective, resource needy, faith-based university setting was negligible. Moreover, the very limited qualitative research on the role of academic and social integration factors as a primary influence over persistence decisions of first-generation students in the private sector was overly broad in scope.

For example, one large study presented in the literature used Tinto's model to test academic and social integration factors as predictors of persistence students at four-year *Council of Christian Colleges and Universities*. The findings of the study indicated that persistence increased as a correlate of institution selectivity. However, the study did not filter the results to examine persistence outcomes of various subgroups—such as high-



risk and first-generation. A deeper scrutiny of the persistence behavior for the first-generation students represented among the student population would have made an important contribution to the retention literature, given the increased presence of first-generation students at private universities. Private universities in general and even faith-based ones, in particular, are not a homogenous group—they vary widely in size, scope, and financial vigor. Private universities with healthy financial resources at their disposal would be expected to expend those resources to aid student success support programming, especially for their at-risk students. Less-selective, private institutions are, inherently, bound by a scarcity of resources available for supporting the additional needs of at-risk students.

Moreover, a principally salient theme that emerged from the literature was that first-year college adjustment, while challenging for all college freshman, poses a primary threat to first-generation students, who often walk onto campus less prepared, on several levels, than their peers. This means that first-generation students must work harder and faster to overcome the academic and social integration challenges that come with the first-year college experience. Therefore, of particular interest in this study was how the academic and social integration experiences of freshman first-generation students may be influenced amidst the small, private, faith-based institutional setting that is challenged by limited available resources to support systemic assistance for at-risk students, especially during their first semester in college.

## **Qualitative Research Paradigm**

Research design is the string of logic that, ultimately, links the data to be collected and the conclusions to be drawn to the initial questions of the study (Yin, 2009). The selection of a qualitative study was based on its ability to generate a description of a given event or an understanding of a specific setting or environment (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This particular study was designed to draw meaning from first-generation students' perceptions of their own academic and social integration experiences during their first semester of college—then to examine how those perceptions affected their decision to persist into the next semester. Therefore, the reflective nature of this study justified the usage of a qualitative research approach.

In addition, most of the research studies on student retention has been quantitative in nature (Kinnick & Ricks, 1993). Hence, a number of researchers have indicated the need for more qualitative research studies, especially studies on student retention that include the views of the students themselves. According to Attinasi:

No matter how theoretically and analytically sophisticated, this approach (quantitative) will never be capable of fully informing us as to how and why particular student outcomes occur. This is because such methods do not, and cannot, adequately capture the perspectives of the individuals whose outcomes are of concern (1989).

Tinto also stressed the importance of including qualitative research methods into the study of student retention. He stated that the “effective assessment of retention also requires the use of a variety of qualitative methods ranging from focus-group interviews

to qualitative interview techniques to explore student perceptions of their experience on campus” (Tinto, 1993, p. 217).

The background setting for the study involved examining the fall semester academic and social experiences of first-generation students currently enrolled at the University for their first-semester in college. Data was collected from within the students’ educational environment where the study participants had experienced the kinds of environmental variables informed by the literature to be associated with measures of student persistence. According to Cresswell (2003), qualitative research takes place within a natural setting where events occur, so this methodology was well suited for an examination of the experiences of at-risk students at a specific institution.

The impetus for this study was the intention for the researcher to be able to use the findings to develop interventions or student support strategies aimed at improving the persistence rate of first-generation students at this University, with the expectation that the findings from the study would also add to the body of knowledge for retention research for institutions that were similarly unique in nature to this specific institution. Indeed, Thayer (2000) implied that findings from targeted research of this nature may be useful from a wider viewpoint, saying “Strategies that work for the first-generation and low-income students are likely to be successful for the general student population as well” (Thayer, p. 3). As additional justification, Cresswell (2003), supported the use of qualitative research as an appropriate research model where the rationale was based upon the desire for specific reform or change (Cresswell, 2003).

The settling on a qualitative approach for this research was also driven by the nature of the subject matter selected for examination. This research was undertaken to examine the influences these students may identify as being influential in their ability to persist in their educational pursuits. It would have been difficult to identify all the possible variables that might be identified by these students as impacting their persistence experiences due to the sheer number of possibilities. Factors such as educational difficulties, financial constraints, family pressures, and a change in marital status, mental and physical health issues, and evolving career aspirations are just some factors that could have been identified by these students. Therefore, a qualitative research perspective was deemed appropriate, since the pertinent variables were difficult to define or identify (Creswell, 2003).

### **Rationale for Case Study Methodology**

A basic, interpretive qualitative method was used throughout this case study. Merriam (1998) described basic interpretive qualitative studies as the most common form of qualitative studies found in education. Case studies emphasize detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions and their relationships. Researcher Robert Yin defined the case study research method as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident, and in which multiple sources of evidence are used (2009). These studies seek to understand (a) how people interpret their experiences, (b) how people create their worlds, and (c) how they attribute meaning to their experiences.

## **Case Study Protocol**

A crucial piece in the case study methodology recommended by Yin (2009) is the development of the case study protocol. Yin (2009) suggested that the researcher must possess or acquire the following skills: the ability to ask good questions and to interpret the responses, be a good listener, be adaptive and flexible so as to react to various situations, have a firm grasp of issues being studied, and be unbiased by preconceived notions. Some of the early critics of the case study as a research methodology argued the fact that it was “unscientific” in nature, and denounced its utility because replication of findings was not possible. Yin (2009) countered these notions, emphasizing the fact that there was more to a case study protocol than the instrument. He asserted that the development of the rules and procedures contained within the protocol enhanced the reliability and validity of case study methodology as an important research tool. According to Yin (2009), a viable protocol should be meticulously comprehensive, and must cover the following material: an outline of the project’s objectives, case study issues, field procedures, researcher credentials for access to data sources, a detailed description for the handling and location of those sources; case study questions, and a guide for the case study report.

## **Constructivist View**

Case study is an ideal methodology when a holistic, in-depth investigation is needed (Yin, 2009). Likewise, it is the preferred method in circumstances when the researcher has little control over the events or when there is a contemporary focus within a real life context. Yin’s (2009) approach was based on the constructivist paradigm.

Constructivists claim that truth is relative and that it is dependent on one's perspective. This archetype recognizes the importance of the subjective human creation of meaning, but doesn't reject outright some notion of objectivity. Constructivism is built upon the premise of a social construction of reality. One advantage of this approach is the close collaboration between researcher and the participants, while enabling participants to tell their story. In the research study the researchers objective was to construct the individual truths about these students' academic and social integration experiences during their first semester in college.

### **Explanatory Case Study**

Yin (2009) identified some specific types of case studies: exploratory, explanatory, and descriptive. Explanatory case studies are commonly used for doing causal investigations. Descriptive cases require a descriptive theory to be developed before starting the project. Given the investigative objectives for this study, this type of research clearly called for the use of an *explanatory* type of case study, given that the overarching goal was to gain understanding of the causal association between students' academic and social integration experiences and their persistence, based on the dynamics of Tinto (1993) student departure model.

### **Analytical Generalization**

A frequent criticism of case study research has been that the results were not widely applicable in real life. Yin refuted that criticism by presenting a well-constructed explanation of the difference between analytic generalization and statistical generalization. The findings from quantitative research are extrapolated through the

process of statistical generalization; whereas in analytic generalization, previously developed theory is used as a template against which to compare the empirical results of qualitative case study research (Yin, 2009). The inappropriate manner of generalizing assumes that some sample of cases has been drawn from a larger universe of cases. Thus, the incorrect terminology such as “small sample” arises, as though a single-case study were a single respondent. Yin (2009) presented at least four applications for a case study model: to explain complex causal links in real-life interventions, to describe the real-life context in which the intervention has occurred, to describe the intervention itself, and to explore those situations in which the intervention being evaluated has no clear set of outcomes.

Merriam (1998) further clarified the relationship between the notion of generalizability and qualitative case study methodology—saying, “In qualitative research, a single case or small non-random sample is selected precisely because the researcher wishes to understand the particular in depth, not to find out what is generally true of the many” (p. 208). Merriam further championed the reliability of qualitative case study by pointing out that in multi-case or cross-case analysis, the use of predetermined questions and specific procedures for coding and analysis enhanced the generalizability of findings in the traditional sense (1998).

### **Single Case Study Methodology**

The qualitative tradition of research can be undertaken utilizing one of five specific traditions: biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, or a case

study (Cresswell, 1998). The case study convention was chosen for this study based on the focus of this research and the goals of the study.

A case study may involve study of a single industry or a particular firm participating in that industry (Yin, 2009). College retention researchers have emphasized the importance of studying the phenomenon of student persistence at their particular institutions. “To successfully address the issue of student retention at the institutional level it may be necessary to first understand the dynamics of student persistence or withdrawal behavior that are unique to the particular institution in question” (Pascarella, 1986, p. 101). This qualitative study takes place at a single university, representing a particular niche within the larger domain of higher educational institutions.

This small, suburban, coeducational institution with liberal arts and professional curricula offers degrees at the undergraduate and graduate levels and is accredited by the *Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools* and is a private, faith-based university. Students are drawn primarily from the Southeastern region of the United States and pursue a broad variety of careers in the arts and sciences, as well as business, education, and nursing.

### **Enrollment Profile of the Case University**

Total enrollment at the university in fall 2012 was approximately 3,130, including 2,779 undergraduates with an average student to faculty ratio of 16:1 (College Navigator, 2012 a). Most undergraduates attended full-time (89 %) and matriculated from in-state (80 %). The gender ratio was 37:63, male to female and over three-fourths of the undergraduate population were 24 years of age or younger. The ethnic distribution was



predominantly Black or African American (30 %) and White (60 %), with a minor representation from Asian (1%) and Hispanic/Latino (3 %) groups (College Navigator, 2012 b).

### **Retention and Graduation Rates at the Case University**

Fifty-six percent of the first-time student pursuing the bachelor's degree in Fall 2011 returned to the institution to continue their studies the following fall. The six-year graduate rate for 2004 beginners was 34 %; the six-year rate for students who began in fall 2006 was 38 %. Females completed at a higher rate than males at 43% versus 28%, respectively. Whites completed at a higher rate than Blacks (African American) at 45% versus 26%, respectively (College Navigator, 2012 c).

### **Student Demographics of the Case University**

The demographics of the University are reflective of the overall state population. At \$47,680 the state's 2003 median household income was 11 % below the national median household income of \$53,692 (US Census Bureau, 2004, Table 688). In 2004, 12.5 % of the state's population lived below the poverty level, nearly three percentage points below the national level of 10.1 percent (US Census Bureau, 2007, Table 690).

### **Freshman Cohort Profile at the Case University**

The Fall 2011 freshman cohort of 690 students reflects a typical profile of the university's undergraduate freshman population which includes many underprepared, low income, and first-generation students. The average SAT score of this particular cohort was 989 and 41% of the class was the first in their family to attend a four-year college. 99% of the cohort received some form of financial; 49% received the federal Pell grant

for low income students. The first-year retention rate of the cohort was 64 % (College Navigator, 2012 d). Although the participants for this study were not associated with the 2011 profile, these demographics are statistically comparable to the Fall 2013 profile from which the study's participants were sampled.

### **Case Study Questions**

Selection of the research questions for this study was motivated by the intent to stimulate the participant's cognitive reflections about the nature of their first-semester academic and social experiences at the University. The interview protocol for the student interviews specifically focused on the two crucial factors of the Tinto (1993) model—*academic* integration and *social* integration and resulted in five research questions that formed the core of the research design:

- How do first-generation, high-risk college students *perceive* that they fit in *academically* at their school?
- How do first-generation, high-risk college students *perceive* the faculty and staff at their college were instrumental in helping them integrate *academically* during their first semester?
- How do first-generation, high-risk college students *perceive* that they fit in *socially* at their school?
- How do first-generation, high-risk college students *perceive* the faculty and staff at their college were instrumental in helping them integrate *socially* during their first semester?

- How do *perceptions* of academic and social integration of first-time, full-time, FGCS affect their intent to persist into their second semester of college?

These particular questions aimed to explore the fitness of the elements of the Tinto model as applied to a particular niche university within higher education.

### **Data Collection**

A key strength of this case study involved the use of multiple sources and techniques in the data gathering process. The researcher determined in advance what evidence to gather and what analytic techniques should be applied to the results in order to answer the research questions. Sources for data in this study emerged from semi-structured, person-to-person interviews, descriptive institutional data, and institutional documentation pertinent to the participants in the study.

### **Databases**

The researcher collected and stored multiple sources of evidence comprehensively and systematically, in formats that could be referenced and sorted so that converging lines of inquiry and patterns were uncovered. Following the lead of exemplary case studies, the researcher used field notes and databases to categorize and reference data so that it was readily available for subsequent reinterpretation (Yin, 2009).

For this qualitative research project, the data collection was organized and documented just as it is typically done for experimental studies. The two types of databases used in this study were the student-related data and the research findings of the investigator. The researcher constructed the database so that other researchers would be

able to use the material based on the descriptions contained in the documentation. All relevant documents were included within the database, as recommended by Yin (2009).

It is imperative for the researcher to safeguard losing sight of the original research purpose and questions amidst the large amount of data generated from the multiple sources employed in the research process. Therefore, as a proactive measure, the researcher created hard copy files for each participant's information and also scanned the materials into portable document format (pdf) stored on an electronic database as a backup.

### **Interview Protocol**

The primary means for collecting data for this study was the semi-structured interview—referred to as an interview guide (Yin, 2009). The semi-structured format enabled the researcher to establish a relaxed yet focused setting for eliciting the narrative responses accounting for the participants' first-semester college experiences. Appropriate interview protocols (Merriam, 1998), such as maintaining good eye contact and careful listening, were followed to permit a deeper understanding of the first-semester academic and social integration experiences of the research participants. The bulk of the data came directly from these student interviews. Literature on first-generation college-student issues informed the development of the interview guide. For this study, the researcher conducted the interviews during a two-week period immediately following the midterm point of the Fall 2013 semester. The researcher used an outline of issues—a series of broad questions—to interact with each participant, using prompts and follow-up questions to fully develop each student's profile.

Each interview was digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim by a third party who was not involved with the study. The interviewer also took notes and reviewed these notes with each participant at the conclusion of the interview. Every student received an electronic copy of the transcription of their interview for additional commentary and clarification. Electronic storage was the primary form of data organization used in the study.

Yin (2009) emphasized that maintaining the relationship between the issue and the evidence was mandatory. To that end, the researcher was diligent to document, classify, and cross-reference all evidence so that it could be efficiently recalled for sorting and examination over the course of the study (Yin, 2009). Moreover, the researcher ensured due care was taken to maintain the privacy of the material digitally recorded for the student interviews in the study.

### **Sample Selection: Purposeful Sampling**

*Purposeful sampling* was used to gather a sub-sample from the University's Fall 2013 freshman cohort. This form of sampling is a tool common to non-probability sampling, when the goal of the researcher is to discover, understand, and gain insight—rather than to generalize to a larger population (Merriam, 1998). The strategy involved criterion-based selection to build a sample that would be directly reflective of the purpose of the study. More specifically, criterion for selection of the students aimed for investigation was informed by a search through scholarly literature that pointed to those attributes common to first-generation college students (FGCS). To that end, the FGCS for this study were drawn from among a freshman cohort enrolled in Freshman Seminar

which is a required first-semester course for all first-time, full-time students at the University. Other criteria for participant selection included enrollment in at least 12 credit hours and identification as a first-generation college student—defined as someone whose parents had not completed a post-secondary degree.

### **Sample Size in Qualitative Research**

Samples for qualitative studies are generally much smaller than those used in quantitative studies. In fact, Ritchie, Lewis & Elam (2003) claimed that there was a point of diminishing return to a qualitative sample wherein—*as the study goes on more data does not necessarily lead to more information*. This is because one occurrence of a piece of data, or a code, is all that is necessary to ensure that it becomes part of the analysis framework. Frequencies are rarely important in qualitative research, as one occurrence of the data is potentially as useful as many in understanding the process behind a topic. This is because qualitative research is concerned with *meaning* and not making generalized *hypothesis statements*. Finally, because qualitative research is very labor intensive, analyzing a large sample can be time consuming and often simply impractical. Within any research area, different participants can have diverse opinions (2003).

Qualitative samples must be large enough to assure that most or all of the perceptions that might be important are uncovered, but at the same time if the sample is too large, data becomes repetitive and, eventually, superfluous. If a researcher remains faithful to the principles of qualitative research, sample size in the majority of qualitative studies should generally follow the concept of saturation (Glaser & Strausser, 1967)—when the collection of new data does not shed any further light on the issue under

investigation. Drawing an analogy using terminology associated with statistical methods, Yin (2009) explained that the selection of the sample should be large enough to detect an *effect*; however, the likelihood of detecting an effect as part of a power analysis was not based on any formula; rather, it was a matter of *judgmental choice*.

Moreover, in qualitative research, the very concept of sample size runs counter to everything a researcher has been taught about sampling. In conventional methods of sampling the researcher aims to think about sampling people and controlling variables; but in theoretical sampling the researcher is not sampling *persons* but *concepts* (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In satisfying the question of “how many participants” may be needed to validate a qualitative study, the researcher is also guided by a concept: *saturation*. Saturation is reached “when no new data are emerging” but is more than a matter of new data. It also denotes the development of categories in terms of their properties and dimensions, including variation (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

The point of saturation is a rather difficult point to identify and a rather elastic notion. New data (especially if theoretically sampled) will always add something new, but there are diminishing returns, and the cut off between adding to emerging findings and not adding is, basically, an arbitrary decision. This has been explored in detail by a number of authors but is still hotly debated, and some say little understood. A sample of PhD studies using qualitative approaches, and qualitative interviews as the method of data collection was taken from *theses.com* and contents analyzed for their sample sizes. Five hundred and sixty studies were identified that fit the inclusion criteria. Results showed that the mean sample size was 31; however, the distribution was non-random,

with a statistically significant proportion of studies presenting sample sizes that were multiples of ten. These results were discussed in relation to saturation. They suggested a premeditated approach that was not wholly congruent with the principles of qualitative research (Mason, 2003). To achieve a satisfactory level of saturation from the student interview process for this study, the researcher attempted to secure 15 individual students from the Freshman Seminar course to participate in the study; although only 12 students were available who met the required profile for the study.

### **Participant Recruitment**

At the university, full-time, first-time freshmen are required to enroll in a college orientation-themed, one-hour course during their first semester; therefore, the potential pool for participants in the study was limited to students enrolled in Freshman Seminar at the university. The data collection process began with the researcher seeking to identify a pool of potential participants from students enrolled in *Freshman Seminar: Undecided Majors* during the Fall 2013 term.

The researcher began the preliminary stage of participant selection by requesting to be a guest speaker at a particular section of the Freshman Seminar course that was exclusively open to students with an undecided major. This particular section of Freshman Seminar was chosen (a) for its potential to include at-risk first-generation students, given that this population often transitions to college without a firm goal for a chosen major, (b) the researcher served as a volunteer professional staff mentor to this particular section, which enabled the researcher to develop a rapport with students prior to the interview phase of the study, and (c) routine opportunity to interact with the class



enabled data collection for the researcher. The researcher shared with the class her desire to form a dissertation study around the experiences of first-generation students.

The researcher distributed the *Participant Demographic Information Form* (Appendix A) to all the students in the class—rather than using a verbal request—in order to show sensitivity to those students who did not wish to reveal their status as a first-generation student. All the students were asked to complete the Participant Demographic Information form which included a section where students could offer their personal contact information if they were interested in receiving follow-up contact from the researcher.

The students who gave their contact information were sent a follow-up communication entitled *Letter of Invitation to Participants* (Appendix B) that provided detailed information about the nature of the study and expectations for the participants. Information from the Participant Demographic Form also served as a mode of data triangulation to ensure the validity of participants chosen for the study.

The students were assured by their class instructor that declining to participate in the study would in no way reflect poorly on their final grade for the class; however, students who did agree to participate had the option to substitute their interview participation for one of five required journal assignments for the class. Students were informed that there would be no penalty for deciding to change their mind about participating in the study.

While the recruitment goal for this study was to elicit at least 12 first-generation students, only nine students who met the study criteria were available from the GNED

101—Undecided section. Therefore, three additional participants were recruited from another section of GNED—101 designed for students who were required to take at least one remedial English or math course.

### **Scheduling Interviews**

In consideration for the various obligations of the participants, the researcher allowed the students to set the time and date for their interviews. The researcher began accepting appointments after the midterm point in the semester for two reasons. First, the participants would have had generous opportunity to form perceptions about their academic and social adjustment. Second, it is after the midterm in the semester when the student body begins meeting with their academic advisors to preregister for following semester; thus, anticipating their advisor meeting would compel them to consider their intentions to persist to the next semester.

The interviews were recorded in the office of the researcher at the University. Each session was audio taped to ensure accuracy of the data and to enable the researcher to remain focused on the students and their responses. Before the interview, each participant agreed to sign an *Informed Consent* (Appendix C) that reiterated the proforma for the interview, including permission to have the session to be digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim for data analysis. The Informed Consent also gave the researcher permission to access the students' university-related demographic data pertinent to the study.

To enhance the quality of the data collection, the researcher sent a follow-up email to the participants confirming the date, time, and location of the interview. In an

attachment to the email, participants were provided *Pre-Interview Reflective Questions* (Appendix D) to use for inspiring their reflections about their academic and social integration experiences at the University. Participants were asked to look over the Pre-interview questions shortly before their appointment time to help them feel comfortable and to enhance the likelihood of achieving lively and interactive dialogue during the actual interview. This step also served as a form of data triangulation for the study, providing participants with additional opportunity for reflection outside of the interview process, and giving the researcher the maximum opportunity to expand on important themes during the limited time-frame spent with the students.

The same *Interview Protocol* (Appendix E) was duplicated with each interview session. The researcher was careful to contain the interview meeting to the agreed-upon 60-minute time-frame. To ensure the accuracy of the data and limit potential bias, the researcher forwarded a digital file of the audio interviews to a third-party transcriber who was neither involved in the study nor personally acquainted with any of the participants. After the transcriptions were completed, the researcher emailed the participants to offer them the opportunity to both review the written transcription of their interviews and respond with any edits they deemed appropriate to correct the accuracy of the record.

### **Pilot Study**

The researcher chose to conduct a pilot study in advance of the actual research project in order to have the opportunity to remove obvious barriers and problems (Yin, 2009). The researcher enlisted the assistance of three first-generation freshman enrolled in Freshman Seminar at the University for Spring 2013 to participate in a mock interview

process aimed to simulate the actual interview that would occur under similar circumstances with the study's actual participants. This preparatory step allowed the interviewer to practice question delivery and monitor details such as clarity of questions, grouping and sequence of questions, and time allowances for certain types of questions.

### **Sensitivity**

During the actual interviews, the researcher was careful to exercise *sensitivity* (Merriam, 1998) by allowing for appropriate moments of silence for reflection, taking time to probe more deeply to enhance clarity, and tactfully changing the direction of the interview when necessary. The mock interview conducted prior to the actual interview phase of the study was a useful a training opportunity for the researcher to enable the actual interviews to proceed with skill and integrity.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Prior to commencing the data collection portion of this study, the researcher acquired a *Memorandum of Permission* (Appendix F) from the University. The researcher was careful to follow all guidelines put forth by Clemson University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and completed an *Exempt Review Application* (Appendix G) to ensure proper protocol would be followed by the researcher for the design elements of the project.

The researcher followed the protocol of informed consent to ensure that participants' privacy rights were protected. Participants were informed verbally and in writing about the goals of the study as well as the data collection, analysis, and storage methods to be used in the study. In this case, the recordings from the interviews and the

transcriptions were stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's office. The researcher's electronic database was secured by user name and password protection. The materials for this research are to remain with the researcher for approximately one year and will then be destroyed. According to the nature and goals for the study, the researcher anticipated no significant risks to the students who agreed to participate in the study.

### **Data Analysis**

Given the researcher's close association to the University and direct involvement in the data collection and analysis process, the researcher was especially careful to limit the impact of any potential bias (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

### **Triangulation of Data**

One of the steps taken to minimize bias was to apply a form of *member checking* by allowing the study participants to review and clarify transcripts from the interview and statements made during data collection (2008).

Another method used to minimize bias was to *triangulate data* by seeking multiple sources of data from the study participants rather than relying only on student interviews. Particularly, this involved several sources: (a) requesting students to complete a demographic background questionnaire, (b) reviewing the students' academic and demographic records, (c) providing pre-interview questions in advance of the actual interview, (d) seeking independent confirmation of students' self-reported usage of academic support services, and (e) monitoring the University's early alert database for reported academic or social concerns about the students.

The researcher fully examined the raw data by using skillful interpretation in order to find linkages between the research object and the outcomes with reference to the original research questions. Throughout the evaluation and analysis process, the researcher remained open to new opportunities and insights. As a research paradigm, the case study, with its use of multiple data collection methods and analysis techniques, provided the researcher with rich opportunity to triangulate data in order to strengthen the research findings and conclusions (Yin, 2009).

### **Trustworthiness**

According to Merriam (1998) it is the researcher's critical presence in the context of occurrence of phenomenon, observation, hypothesis-testing, triangulation of participants' perceptions, and during all phases of the research process that aligns the element of *trustworthiness* between qualitative research and quantitative research.

Assimilating trustworthiness into this qualitative research process was satisfied by using specific techniques when analyzing the student data and interview responses, to include placing information into arrays, creating matrices of categories, creating flow charts, and tabulating frequency of events. Moreover, the researcher used the students' quantitative data that was collected to corroborate and support the qualitative data that would inform the rationale or theory underlying relationships (Yin, 2009). When a pattern from one data type was corroborated by the evidence from another, the finding became stronger. When evidence conflicted, deeper probing of the differences was necessary to identify the cause or source of conflict. In all cases, the researcher treated

the evidence fairly to produce analytic conclusions answering the original "how" and "why" research questions for the study (Yin, 2009).

### **Coding Data**

To confirm the creditability of the research findings, the student interview data was analyzed using a qualitative data mining tool commonly referred to as coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Specifically, the researcher was able to dig beneath the surface to uncover the richer meanings held within the student interview data by using qualitative research software called *QSR Nvivo* (Version 10) to facilitate the coding process. Corbin and Strauss (2008) recognized that analytic tools are the mental strategies that researchers use when coding. Codes denote the words of participants or incidents as concepts derived from observation or video.

Operationalized, the schema of coding proceeded in three distinct phases. In the beginning step, the researcher began analyzing data into several categories—a process known as *open coding* which is typically driven by questions useful to uncovering key meaning within the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Sensitizing questions helped the researcher to identify what the data might be indicating and further nuances of the context of the issue.

To move the analysis of data forward, the researcher applied a technique called *axial coding*—which involved the researcher using theoretical questions to identify variations in the data and to make connections between concepts and categories created during the open coding phase (2008).

### **Single Case Analysis**

The core analysis of this study included a case analysis for each participant (Merriam, 1998). By writing up each story, the researcher was successful in understanding the context of each participant's experience. Following the write-up of each case began a process of cross-case analysis, informed by both the initial interviews for each participant and any additional notes that accompanied the interviews

### **Reliability and Validity**

Reliability has to do with the consistency of research results (Babbie, 1989). For example, if a scale indicated the same weight for an object each time that it is repeatedly weighed, it is considered to be reliable. Validity has to do with whether or not the measure in procedure accurately measured the phenomenon under study (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Qualitative researchers have developed their own sets of criteria to improve the validity and reliability of their studies (Glasser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 2008; Yin, 2009). Stringer (2004) suggested that the question of the reliability and validity of qualitative methods, including case study research, was due, in part, because the traditional academic criteria used for assessing quantitative research was inappropriate for qualitative research. The essential nature of qualitative case study research is different from quantitative studies. Qualitative methods are essentially subjective in nature and local in scope, procedures for assessing the validity of research are quite different than those used for experimental study (Stringer, 2004, p. 56).



### **Researcher Statement of Positionality**

Central to interpretive methods is the careful reflexivity of the researcher (Crotty, 1998). Positionality allows the researcher to clearly state the lens through which s/he interprets a social world. Qualitative researchers reflect on their position as they engage their participants and complete the research process. Therefore, a statement of positionality can highlight how the researcher dealt with any preconceived notion about the phenomenon in both the data analysis and the qualitative interactions with the subjects. Given that the researcher in this study is employed as an academic administrator at the University and has extensive experience working with students at the institution, a question may arise as to the subjectivity of the researcher in interpreting student responses from the interviews.

I believe that I am uniquely positioned to conduct this research based on my background and personal position on the issue. As an academic administrator of the University, with direct supervisory responsibilities over all academic support areas for the University, I have had opportunity to interact professionally with all subgroups of the university at the undergraduate and graduate levels—from honor students to at-risk students to students on academic probation. I have also served as an adjunct professor at the University, teaching both Learning Strategies and Freshman Seminar.

My experience with students at the University has a two-fold significance. First, extensive experience with all types of students is supportive of my claim as a researcher to be capable of avoiding bias with respect to prejudicial anticipatory responses from the student subgroup that is the focus of this study.

Second, my multiple roles in interacting with students—from teaching to mentoring to advising, and counseling—have provided ample opportunity to develop excellent interviewing skills, which serves as a valid proxy for the lack of professional research skills as an unpublished PhD candidate. The recognition of my practical experience with students is important to the extent that it may sufficiently overcome the relatively small sample size presented in this study.

### **Chapter Three Summary**

This study was designed to examine the perceptions of a purposeful sampling of an at-risk subgroup of a single institution's first-time full-time and first-semester students. The study utilized Tinto's model of social and academic integration as a lens to attempt to better understand why some at-risk college students at this particular small, private, less-selective university fail to persist in college. This chapter described the proposed case study research design and methodology that is to be used in this study. It described the data collection instruments including individual interview protocols and the use of data triangulation to ensure reliability and validity of the study. It also included evidence of the proper documentation and protocols required to conduct research with human subjects.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

It is difficult to report findings in a concise manner, and yet it is the researcher's responsibility to convert a complex phenomenon into a format that is readily understood by the reader. The goal of this report was to describe the study in such a comprehensive manner as to enable readers to feel as if they had been an active participant in the research and can determine whether or not the study findings could be applied to their situation. According to Yin (2009), the reporting aspect of a case study is perhaps most important from the user perspective, since it is the contact point between the user and the researcher. The findings in this chapter served to explain the process by which the collected data were evaluated in order to answer the central research questions of this study.

#### **Student Interview Data**

Knowing from research that the issues of faculty, staff, and peer support and interaction were key components of college student retention, the student interviews were organized to incorporate open-ended questions designed to elicit responses about the type and level of academic and social support the students *perceived* they were receiving from their faculty, staff, and peers at the university. The findings emerged through the process of framing what was captured from the interviews—in terms of the research questions.

## **Participant Demographics**

All of the 12 students who agreed to participate completed the student questionnaire and followed through with their commitment to be interviewed. According to responses from the student questionnaire, all twelve were the first in their immediate family to be completing college. Seven of the students came from single-parent homes. Eight of the students lived in the dorms and four were commuter students. Four of the students declared Baptist as their religious preference; six were protestant faiths other than Baptist; and two students were Catholic. Seven students were part of an ethnic minority; two were Hispanic; one was a Pacific Islander; and five were Black. Ten of the twelve were in-state students; the out-of-state students came from California and Germany (Table 4.1).

One-half of the participants were accepted into the university on the basis of meeting the regular criteria for admissions of a minimum SAT Verbal score of 480 or higher and a minimum SAT Math score of 440 or higher (Table 4.2). One-half of the students were accepted into the university through a conditional *Bridge Program*, a program for students who were determined to have potential difficulty with a regular freshman course load. Students who are accepted into this program must pass required remedial math or English courses within their first thirty (30) hours or enrollment in order to continue their studies at the university. Of the students accepted by way of the Bridge Program, three required remediation in English only; one required remediation in math only; and two required remediation for both English and math (Table 4.2). Nine of the students attended a high school where the student minority population equaled or

exceeded thirty percent; eight attended a high school where thirty percent or more of the population was considered to be economically disadvantaged (Table 4.3).

One-half of the students reported that the university had been their first choice in selecting a college; two students said the university was the only college at which they had applied (Table 4.2). Seven of the twelve students had declared a major by the end of the semester; five remained undecided. There were four student athletes among the participants, with three attending on athletic scholarships and one student who was currently ineligible because of his high school grades. One of the student athletes also had an academic scholarship (Table 4.2).

The demographics for the 12 participants in the study were somewhat skewed from the university's Fall 2013 overall undergraduate population. For example, the gender ratio (Table 4.1) of the total undergraduate population was 37:63 (male/female); whereas, the ratio among these participants was 58:42 (male/female). In addition, 67% of the students in this study self-reported a minority ethnic status (i.e., Black, Asian, or Hispanic), versus a 30% ratio, collectively, for these races among the larger population (4.1). Also, a smaller proportion (83%) of the participants had in-state status, versus 89% amongst all undergraduates (4.1). There were also more Pell recipients (67%) within this group, versus 49% from the total undergraduate population (Table 4.3). The average SAT for the participants was 960, versus an average of 989 for the total undergraduate population (Table 4.2). In general, the demographic profiles of the student participants were consistent with what the literature termed to consider as being first-generation and at-risk.

Ten of the twelve participants returned for the following semester; however, two were unable to register because of an outstanding student account balance (Table 4.1). The two students unable to return because of a student account hold said they planned to return to the university once they were able to secure funding to finishing paying their bill. Only two of the participants had unmet financial aid need amounting to less than \$5000 (Table 4.3). The two students who did not return because of an unpaid bill had an unmet financial need in excess of \$13,000.

Table 4.1  
*Participant Personal Demographics*

Name	Returned 2 <sup>nd</sup> Semester	Gender	First Generation Student	Lives on- campus	Student Athlete	Minority Ethnic Status	Religion is Baptist	Single- Parent Home	In- State Student
SB	Y	F	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N
BG	Y	M	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
RG	Y	M	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
BH	N	M	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
RH	Y	F	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	Y
DL	N	M	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
NL	Y	F	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N
JM	Y	M	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y
NS	Y	F	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y
BT	Y	M	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
BW	Y	F	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y
LC	Y	M	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y

Note: "Y" = Yes; "N" = No; "M" = Male; and "F" = Female.

Table 4.2  
Participant Academic Demographics

Student	University was Top Choice	High School GPA	First-semester Mid-term GPA	First-semester Final GPA	Needed Remedial Math or English	Major is Undecided	SAT Score Combined
SB	N	3.26	1.38	1.38	None	N	1060
BG	Y	2.59	1.27	2.24	Both	Y	880
RG	N	3.28	1.06	0.92	None	N	910
BH	N	2.14	1.63	0.19	English	N	910
RH	N	3.04	2.19	2.71	Math	N	800
DL	N	2.99	1.78	2.12	Both	Y	770
NL	Y	3.21	3.38	4.00	English	N	980
JM	Y	2.62	1.25	2.13	None	N	970
NS	Y	3.94	3.34	3.81	None	N	1100
BT	Y	4.17	3.72	3.81	None	Y	1210
BW	Y	3.05	1.84	1.56	None	Y	990
LC	N	2.45	2.54	1.4	English	Y	940

Note: "Y" = Yes; "N" = No.

Table 4.3  
Participant Financial Demographics

Student	% Minority Status in High School Population	% High School Population Economically Disadvantaged	Unmet Financial Need in College	Receives Pell Grant in College
SB	67	52	\$3,997	Y
BG	58	55	\$11,255	Y
RG	50	53	\$14,881	Y
BH	41	41	\$19,050	N
RH	22	18	\$17,784	Y
DL	79	45	\$13,755	Y
NL	**	**	\$6,205	N
JM	9	**	\$5,497	N
NS	44	32	\$0	N
BT	44	31	\$4,201	Y
BW	9	**	\$9,105	Y
LC	58	55	\$6,105	Y

\*data unavailable

Note: Note: "Y" = Yes; "N" = No.

### **Coding Student Interviews**

The first level of data analysis involved systematic review of each of the 12 interview transcription documents to outline overarching concepts and categories revealed by the student's responses—a qualitative research tool called open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Open coding refers to the initial interpretive process by which raw research data are first systematically analyzed and categorized (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This involved “sweeping” through each interview and highlighting selections of text that represented key behaviors, events, activities, meanings, feelings, opinions or strategies. As coding continued, relationships were elaborated within the transcripts and meanings were addressed. Eventually, themes were developed to extrapolate theoretical interpretation of the data to address the research questions.

### **Axial Coding Nodes**

The next phase of the data analysis involved refining the raw themes and categories which emerged from the open coding and relating them to their subcategories, a process called axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The essence of axial coding is to identify some central characteristic or phenomenon (the axis) around which differences in properties or dimensions exist. Axial coding is, therefore, a process of reassembling or disaggregating data in a way that draws attention to the relationships between and within categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Exploratory research that is interested in evaluating theory has to deal with the interpretation of data in ways that specify the concepts of interest, causal relationships, the presence and effect of contextual relationships, and outcomes.



### **First Phase of Axial Coding**

Given the purposeful exploratory nature of the project to draw out perceptions of these students' academic and social adjustment to college, the hunt to identify relevant ideas and phrases was guided by the overarching concepts—*academic* integration and *social* integration. More specifically, key words and phrases from the semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix E) served as an intuitive template to help organize the data and 12 of the initial themes arose directly from these questions. Other themes emerged as revealed through common threads interwoven amidst the student responses.

Eventually, this initial round of axial coding resulted in the identification of 30 themes (Table 4.4) representing the students' perceptions of their first-semester academic and social experiences in college. However, immediately into the axial coding process a dynamic overlap of the coded data across the variety of nodes hinted at a significant interrelationship amongst the inspired themes that would require more complex analysis. Therefore, this initial stratum of axial codes needed to be further examined in order to develop and define the interrelating categories.

Table 4.4

*First Phase of Axial Coding*

Code Type	Code Name	Code Name	Code Name
Phase 1 Axial Codes	Academic Issues*	Family Influence	Relationships
	Campus Atmosphere	Financial Need	Religious Faith
	Campus Involvement*	First Generation in College	Resident Life
	Campus Location	Friends*	Scholarships
	Commitment	Goals*	Self-Image
	Confidence	High School Transition	Social Issues*
	Decision Making	Homesick	Sports
	Emotions	Institutional Support*	Staff*
	External Obligations	Mentoring	Stress
	Faculty*	Motivation*	Time Management

\*Codes derived directly from topics covered in the interview protocol.

### Examination of First Phase Axial Coding

#### Family Influence/ Close to Home/ Challenges/ Emotions

*Homesick* advanced as a theme since several students mentioned this emotion specifically; for example, NL said: “I think the biggest challenge is definitely homesickness because I’m from another country,” and also: “I have to learn to handle this emotions connected with the home sickness and stuff like this. I think it helps me becoming a little bit stronger.” (Note: NL’s home country is Germany and English is her second language). NL’s remarks were associated with *Homesick*, *Challenges*, and *Sports*, since she is also a student athlete. *Homesick* and *Challenges* overlapped with the theme *Emotions*, which included a range of sub-themes; for example, BG shared: “I know I don’t want to let my momma and grandma down—a notion that spilled into

another theme—Family Influence. SB’s statement: “...and emotionally, I’ve probably cried the most that I have ever cried before because I just get homesick because I am really close to my family” spanned the themes Emotions, Challenges, Close to Home, and Family Influence. To several of the students, being close to home and family was an important factor in school choice, so Campus Location held considerable appeal, as in BW’s decision: “Actually, this is the only place I applied to because I just went to high school right across the street at Northwood Academy, so, I just chose here because it was just convenient.”

### **High School Transition/ Decision-Making/ Confidence**

JM’s statement: “I just feel I am so far in this rut of bad grades, just being like blindsided by the difficulty of college, compared to what I’m used to” portrayed an emotional response, but also revealed a common connection among other student responses leading to yet another theme—*High School Transition*. For another example, when asked about his decision-making process in considering the choice of a college major, BT openly admitted having the *emotions* of “a little fear” and “panic” at the self-realization that “this is a changing point and I don’t know where I’m supposed to go.” He also added two additional thoughts: “I try to do my best and everything, but it feels like I am doing something wrong, always,” and: “I’m not used to deciding for myself.” These phrases from BT coded under not only within *Emotions*, *High School Transitions*, *Challenges*, *Confidence* and *Decision-Making*, but also *Self-Image*.

## **Self-Image/ Motivation/ Commitment/ Academic Issues**

BW provided a glimpse of her *Self-image* and *Confidence* with the comment: “I feel like other people are just naturally smart and I have to study for hours to be able to understand ...my friends—they’ll sit down and study for an hour and make an A; I’ll study for an hour get a C.” BT viewed himself as “more of a wallflower” when talking about his ability to connect socially, and had this to say when asked about attending recreational activities on campus: “I’d like to, but I was the kid, literally, always had the ball slammed into my face.”

JM, who revealed personal struggles with Attention-Deficit Disorder since middle school, made this telling comment: “I think everybody has some kind of handicap; but everybody can—if they apply themselves—have great potential!” JM’s comments were included not only in *Self-Image*, *Academic Issues*, *High School Transitions*, *Confidence*, and *Challenges*; but also in *Motivation and Commitment*. When asked how he thought he was fitting in socially so far, BG said: “I don’t fit in like that...some people don’t have the same circumstances that I do...just where I came from...I grew up kind of rough...lost my daddy at two-weeks old, so I never had a daddy.” These thoughts were coded under *Self-Image*, *Family Influence*, *Challenges*, and also *Motivation and Commitment*.

In yet another example of an emotional response, RG said: “I’ve honestly been nervous; I don’t know why” when attempting to explain why he had not used any of the various modes of academic *institutional support* available to him—even though admitting he was facing academic difficulty. This comment was assigned to the themes

*Emotions, Institutional Support, Decision-Making, Goals, Academic Issues, Confidence, Motivation, and Commitment.*

### **Resident Life/ Social Issues/ Friends/Relationships/ Goals/ Mentoring**

NS recalled feeling “so depressed,” saying: “I just hated it because I felt alone” when explaining that her roommate’s experience with making new friends during the first weeks of school seemed to progress effortlessly, while she initially felt “so lost.” These phrases were recorded simultaneously within the themes *Emotions, Resident Life, Social Issues, Friends, Challenges, and Relationships*. On the other hand, SB reported having a much different experience—a seemingly ready-made support group in her coaches and teammates. For example, when asked who had made the greatest impact early on in her experiences at CSU, SB said: “...the softball girls, probably.” She followed up with: “They’re telling me about tutoring—and my coach is also telling me about tutoring and stuff—and the Learning Center...and all that stuff.”

According to this from SB, her teammates also served as instant friends and mentors: “...and also a lot of them have already taken the classes I’m taking, so they already know a lot of it, too—so I can go to them.” This text was coded as *Resident Life, Social Issues, Friends, Challenges, Relationships, Resident Life, and Mentoring*. When asked about her greatest challenge so far at CSU, RH revealed: “I would have to say it was problems with my roommate—the Dean—he helped out a ton, so it’s resolved now.” RH apparently had a bit of a rocky beginning with the *resident life* experience, but was able to find some help to turn it around. This material was coded as *Resident Life, Social*

*Issues, Friends, Challenges, Relationships, Resident Life, Institutional Support, Staff, and Mentoring.*

### **Stress/ Financial Issues/ Scholarships**

*Stress* was another common thread that intercepted a number of other themes. For example, NL (our international student) shared:

The first days I was very stressed out because I tried to write down everything what the professor was talking about. Now, I just realized all the PowerPoint presentations are online, so I don't have to write it all down. I can just listen and write it down; it's much easier.

These notes were connected to *Stress, Academic Issues, Challenges, Faculty, High School Transition, and Goals*.

BG's comments: "I can't go back to Greenville cause I got in a lot of trouble in high school;" and: "I know if I go back home, I'll get back in the same crowd" suggested that he felt significant *stress* related to his perceived necessity to be able to stay in college. These thoughts were coded not only as *Stress*, but also as *Motivation* and *Commitment*. Another source of *stress* for BG was evident from this statement: "The biggest problem is I don't have any of my books." This comment was also coded as *Stress*, along with *Academic Issues, Challenges, and Financial Issues*.

Scholarship opportunity also surfaced as an appeal factor in choosing the university, as in the case of DL: "I received a call from Charleston Southern University as far as a possible scholarship and this school fit me best." The prospect for *scholarships* also made the difference for NL, who said: "I am just thankful that I got this opportunity,

so I really want to graduate and use this opportunity; I have both academic and athletic scholarships.”

### **High School Transition/ Time Management/ External Obligations**

Several *high school transition* issues had a common connection with *stress*; for example RG said that “adjusting to the workload” was his biggest challenge. This statement crossed over the areas of *Academic Issues, Challenges, Goals, Time Management, Stress* and *High School Transition*. Another common challenge for these students’ transition into college had to do with their expectations; for example, BH said: “When I first got here, I thought it was going to be easy breezy just like high school, but here it’s a whole other ball game...It’s like you have a choice to turn in something or not turn in.” Similar notions were expressed by several of the students—the idea that high school is “way different” from college.

As another example, NS said: “Back in high school, I never studied because you didn’t really have to, and here, you definitely do, and you have to, like—*read!*” Another common thread among the student observations echoed this, from NS: “The professors don’t go over the textbook with you in class; you have to go over it before class, even if they don’t tell you to—you just have to do it. That’s been so hard!” *Time Management* Issues also appeared as a significant stressor for some of the students; for example, BT said:

One of my concerns is that I might miss something since everything is all based on a schedule. I have to mentally put that schedule in my head or try writing it

down on a journal. I'm scared that I might miss something in that schedule or something little in each paper.

For BH, who is a commuter student, time management was a particularly important skill to master since he also juggled work along with academic commitments. For him getting up in the morning and managing traffic in order to get to school on time was a major challenge, saying:

Now I know that, so I set my schedule up for next semester for all my classes to be sort of back to back. I will have at least some type of free time between classes and still be able to go to lunch and manage my work schedule. I also work at Subway about 35 hours a week.

These comments from BT and BH were coded as *Stress, Challenges, High School Transition, Academic Issues*, and also *Goals, Time Management, Motivation*, and *Commitment*.

### **Religious Faith**

Another common thread overarching responses to many questions was the idea of *Religious Faith*. While questions from the interview protocol *were* purposefully aimed to elicit students' compatibility with the religious belief system underpinning the mission of the university; interestingly, students also used their faith beliefs as a filter when responding on multiple topics. For example, NL had this to say about how her perception of the university has changed since she arrived on campus: "It's what I experienced that people are more friendly; they're more likely to help me if I have problems because of their faith. It just feels like a big community here." RH responded to the same question



this way: “I kind of see how people are and what people got into here and it’s uplifting; it’s very encouraging here. I don’t think I’d get that at another college.” These comments were coded as *Campus Atmosphere*, *Friends*, *Relationships*, *Mentoring*, as well as *Religious Faith*.

### **Sports/ Campus Atmosphere/ Campus Involvement/ Faculty**

When asked what kind of changes he had seen in himself over the semester, BH responded like this: “My friends on campus—I wouldn’t say they are like super Christian, but they’re close to being super Christian; they changed me a little bit.” BH’s response was coded with *Religious Faith* and *Friends*, *Relationships*, *Mentoring*, and *Self-Image*. SB gave this response—coded as *Sports*, *Campus Atmosphere*, *Motivation*, and *Commitment*—as to why she had decided to persist at the university: “Softball probably, and then I really like how it’s a Christian school.” SB also drew *faith* into her response about *campus involvement*, saying: “I go to a lot of campus outreaches; I go to *Elevate* (weekly Christian fellowship program on campus) all the time.” When asked why he had chosen to persist, RG responded: “Just the basics, like—I just like the morals of this school.” He also added: “I honestly thought it would be a Christian university, but I thought professors wouldn’t really be saying anything about it—wouldn’t integrate it with their lesson; but they did, and so that was nice.” These comments were coded under *Faith*, *Faculty*, *Academic Issues*, *Campus Atmosphere*, and *Mentoring*.

Mostly, the students appreciated the importance of developing a good relationship with professors, but BW pointed out that interacting with faculty beyond the classroom environment can be challenging for first-semester students:

It was different because in my high school we were really close with our teachers just cause we had such small classes, so it was really easy just to talk to them and have relationships with them. But here, it's a little harder—just because the classes are a little bigger and professors don't always know everybody yet.

### **Integrating Faith and Learning**

NS cited her *faith* beliefs to explain why she initially chose to attend the university, saying: “When you come to college it's easy to stray from the things you believe in—like your morals and all that stuff; I like having that religious background just to keep me on track.” Her responses were coded as *Religious Faith*, *Goals*, *Motivation*, *Commitment*, and *Self-Image*. JM had this to say when asked what initially appealed to him about the university: “Well, I like the fact that it's a Christian university and it has good athletics.” DL also claimed his *faith* as one of the main reasons for choosing the university, saying: “I felt like this school would be the best to fit me, knowing I was a Christian and I could express how I felt at this school more.” These thoughts by DL coded on *Religious Faith*, as well as *Campus Atmosphere*, *Relationships*, *Campus Involvement*, *Goals*, *Academic Issues*, *Social Issues*, *Motivation* and *Commitment*. On the other hand, BW's observation—coded as *Campus Atmosphere*, *Academic Issues*, *Social Issues*, *Religious Faith*, and *Campus Involvement*—is a testimony to the fact that the university does not require students to sign a statement of faith as prerequisite for acceptance:

I mean there are some people who don't have the same beliefs. I can see people in Chapel that just sitting on their phones and they are, like, “When can this be

over?” and stuff like that. You can tell some people just aren’t into it. I mean, at least some people know a general idea of what this school is trying to do with the Christian aspect of it.

Relating the extent of his interaction with faculty outside of the classroom, DL shared: “Mr. D, I talk to him, as far as, getting to be a better Christian and what I can do outside of class. I also met with him a couple of times in the Library and we met a couple of times in Java City and had a cup of coffee.” NS said one reason she liked the university was because: “All the curriculum is integrated in faith—or faith is integrated in all of it. I like it because it just keeps you on the right path, you know?” When sharing his reason for choosing to persist, JM said: “I was surprised—the truth, the realness of it. We have great pastors, great faculty, everybody is supportive. I like this school. I didn’t really think it was going to be as...I didn’t think it would be so close.”

### **Institutional Support**

Another theme that was formed from the interview protocol was *Institutional Support*. Interestingly, by the time of these interviews at fall mid-term, all of the students professed some level of awareness for the various means of academic and social assistance available to them on campus—even though some of them admitted they had not made use of those resources. BT offered this:

I thought nobody could help me, but as I kept going on, I have found out that there are a lot of people that are willing to help me—faculty, staff, and the Writing Center; basically, a lot of people to help me improve my confidence...see what they can do to help me do better.

In fact, LC, after his first campus tour, made the decision to attend the university, in part, because of the support services accessible to students:

So after that, I knew I would come. What helped me to decide was the small classes and all the resources you have here—like the Learning Center, the Math Lab, and the Library is never too crowded. Java City is right there if you get tired while you're in the library. You just have a lot of different things you can rely on here to help keep your grades up and also help keep you involved.

### **Institutional Support/ Staff**

The student athletes quickly cited their coaches as primary champions of their ability to adjust, both academically and socially. When asked who at the university had made a significant impact on him in his first semester, BG said:

Coach W, the DB coach; he comes to talk to me all the time to make sure I stay out of trouble and stuff like that. I see them (football coaches) around and they make sure my grades are straight and make sure I stay on top of everything.

According to NL, her coach had made a huge impact on her transition into campus life, saying: "I was in contact with him since last year. We were writing every day to organize things. Yes, so I trust him very much." She added: "They (coaches) really help—not just with soccer, they help keep you on the right track; they watch out for you and act like your parents away from home." In fact, said NS: "I loved my coach—he really is the reason that I came here." SB echoed this same attachment to her athletic team contacts, saying her "softball girls" were a tremendous source of support and motivation and that

her coach was always "...telling me about tutoring—and my coach is also telling me about tutoring and stuff—and the Learning Center and all that stuff."

### **Institutional Support/ Faculty**

For some of the students, faculty relationships extended beyond the classroom and provided a form of much appreciated Institutional Support. For example, this from BG: "I go talk to my advisor all the time—at least once or twice a week just to check up on everything—make sure everything is going good." Still talking about his advisor, BG added this: "Mrs. H, she's in my corner, just trying to help me; I can talk to her about things." DL echoed the same thankfulness, saying: "My advisor and my professors are really that extra motivation because all they want to do is see me succeed." He followed with: "Yes, I know I have all these positive influences, all these teachers that want to see me succeed and would do anything that it takes for me to succeed." DL also cited receiving support from his advisor, saying: "She's helping me with what career fits me, what I'm good at—to choose my major."

BH offered this telling observation: "The teachers tell you this is how you can pass a course and it's upon yourself to do them." He went on to cite a specific professor who made an impact on him: "Mrs. C—she's very impactful for me. She really motivates me also because she always wants to see me succeed. She's always happy to see me. Every time I'm not in class, she's worried about me." BG also called out a specific professor who had made a positive impact, saying:

My math professor, Mrs. W, I remember when first coming here I missed a couple of her classes and she sent me a report saying I'm close to getting an FA

(failure for absences). My grade in her class wasn't the best grade. She really set me down and talked to me about it.

In yet another example, BH said: "My professor, Mrs. H, makes me feel comfortable being in class. Really, if she wasn't my Bridge professor, I don't know if I'd still be the same person. I'd really like to thank her." BT, who had been accepted into the Honors Program, but decided early in the semester to opt out of going in that direction after seeking advice from a faculty member, had shared this: "Dr. PB—even though I was only part of the honors program for not even the whole semester—not even half the semester—he assured me that even though I left the program that there was no fear of doing it." Clearly, those words of comfort from his Honors Program advisor helped to calm BT's self-admitted "shaky confidence."

### **Institutional Support/Peer Mentors**

Resident Life Assistants (RA) are student leaders who are in charge of mentoring a group of students living on their hall. When asked about changes in his perceptions of the university over the course of the semester, RG, who is a resident student, gave this credit to his RA: "My RA—G—he's a cool person and he helped me get adjusted to college." RH mentioned getting support from one of her peer leaders, saying: "T—she's like a young life leader that I met over the summer and she goes here—she kind of got me involved with *Elevate* (a campus Christian organization) and stuff." From comments like these, it became apparent that the influence of peer relationships spanned larger than merely supplying friends to "hang out with" and extended to providing a firm foundation of support for healthy academic and social integration.

## **Institutional Support Services**

The university has multiple resources available to students at no charge that offer support for both academic and social needs. In fact, students accepted into the *Bridge Program*, which is designed to provide remedial math or English support, are placed in sections of math or English with a component that requires compulsory usage of math or English tutoring. The Math Lab and the Writing Lab are separate units created to serve this purpose. In addition, the university has a full-service Learning Center that provides academic support across the curriculum; but, its use is discretionary. Half of the participants in this study were accepted into the Bridge Program—three for English support only; one for math support only; and two needed support for both math and English. BH, who was accepted Bridge English, offered this insightful opinion:

I feel because there is so many things at the school that we have—the Writing Center, the Student Success Center, and we have the Math Lab center. So, I feel like, there shouldn't be no reason for things to be as bad because we have so many tutoring options that are free. Being in the Bridge Academy, you have to go the *My Writing Lab*—the Writing Lab Center.

RH was accepted as “Bridge math only” and was not required, yet chose, to use the Writing Center. This student also praised the helpfulness of this support opportunity saying: “It’s so good because they taught me how to use my commas right.” DL, who required both math and English remediation, expressed the benefit to him by contributing: “Now that I have these professors here and them helping me become a better reader and writer, it’s actually been beneficial to me. Now it’s (writing) become

one of my strengths.” LC said: “I used the math lab. I didn’t go to the Learning Center; I should have.” LC, who was “Bridge English” and placed into a regular math class did not choose to seek help from the Math Lab or English Lab. This respondent offered this observation: “That’s probably why I struggled; I plan to go now!”

The university also has a professionally staffed Counseling Center with services offered at no charge. Although none of these students mentioned using the Center, SB had this to say about the availability of counseling services on campus:

It’s hard being like no one understands you, I guess. So it good that they have counseling here and like you have so many people you can talk to. It’s good they have that. Like, if you didn’t let your feelings out and had no one to talk to, that would be really hard.

### **Institutional Support/Supplemental Instruction**

The university began using peer-assisted study sessions to improve student retention and success within sections of freshman-level World Civilization courses in the Fall 2013 term. Several of the students were enrolled in World Civilization during the period of this study and expressed genuine approval of this academic support strategy. For example SB shared an interesting story:

One of my classes we take SI (supplemental instruction) exams—or like diagnostic exams, and you have to get above 55 to have to go to the SI sessions. So, I just don’t study for those and I try to do bad on them so that I know that I have to go to the SI session. If I don’t have to go—I won’t go. They really help. I just have to trick myself to do everything possible.



NS also participated in supplemental instruction sessions and appreciated the flexibility that the peer-assistant element brought to the situation, explaining: “He meets us at 6 and we’ll stay until 10 at night—just go over it with us until we get it.” She emphasized her approval with this comment: “I hated history—but that’s like my highest grade right now; SI has definitely helped!” BG added to this thread with this:

He explains it way better than Dr. Martin does. The SI, he made me understand it a little more. When I am in class I’m just dumbfounded; but when I go to the SI session, I like how he explains it.

BW, who was also enrolled for World Civilization claimed awareness of both the Math Lab and supplemental instruction, but added: “I haven’t been to any of them, yet.” When asked why she had not taken advantage of tutoring opportunities, BW said:

I just—I don’t know. There’s something that always seem to be going on whenever I should be going. I definitely could make time. I just don’t—probably, getting bad enough grades—where I’m, “Ok I got to change it”. My midterm grade is what really showed me that I need to step it up.

### **Institutional Support/Student Success Center**

The Student Success Center is the umbrella department for several academic support services, including the Freshman Seminar GNED course, in which all of these students were enrolled during Fall 2013. One of the things BT found useful about the course was that: “She (professor) told us about a lot of stuff. She told us a lot of ways to go through the activities.” When asked about university staff or faculty who had made an impression on his persistence at the university, LC said it was “Definitely Professor B,

especially lately” who was his Freshman Seminar instructor. LC also propped up D M, the coordinator of the Brewer (Recreation) Center as being instrumental in helping him get involved, socially and “the pastor at the Sunday services here, JD—he’s been helpful.”

At midterm, several of the students were still undecided about their major and RG pointed out that “I’m supposed to be working on that this semester in my GNED class—I’m in a section of Freshman Seminar with undecided students.” The Student Success Center also uses an “Early Alert System” as a strategy to connect with the campus community to identify students struggling with all types of adjustment issues. BH was aware of the early alert strategy and commented: “If you miss class you will be alerted about it—so you have to go. It’s upon yourself to get your work done instead of a teacher saying, ‘Oh, you missed it’.”

### **Second Phase: Hierarchical Axial Coding**

This deeper analysis of the initial phase of axial coding was used to inform the next phase of analysis where the original axial codes (Table 4.4) would be further examined to disaggregate those categories into more meaningful themes, determine relationships between existing categories and, eventually, aggregate emergent categories under larger themes using a method of coding called *hierarchical* axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The process formed a hierarchical arrangement of codes, like a tree, with a branching array of sub-codes. The final result was a visual and theoretical presentation, wherein the codes in the tree related to their *parents* by being “examples of” or “contexts for” or “causes for” or “settings for” the phenomenon under research. Moreover, the

final themes and sub-themes emerging from this process served as a hinge to the central phenomenon—how perceptions of *academic* and *social* integration experiences led to the participants’ decisions to persist into their second semester in college. The end result was a seven-level hierarchical depiction of the mitigating factors that motivated these students to continue to persist at the University.

### **Developing the Hierarchy**

At the hierarchical level of analysis, cross-case comparisons of individual student responses to the questions was used to uncover commonalities among student perceptions that directed the decision-making process for shaping the hierarchy of themes (hierarchical axial coding). To this end, questions from the interview protocol were separated into six categories, according to their inter-correlation and connection to the overarching research questions of the study.

#### **Interview Protocol Guides Development of Hierarchy**

Student responses to questions across the six categories were recorded into separate tables using Microsoft Word. The six groupings created for this purpose were:

1. Initial and Continuing Commitment to Persist (Appendix H);
2. Academic Adjustment (Appendix I);
3. Institutional Support-Mentoring (Appendix J);
4. Institutional Support-Services (Appendix K);
5. Social Adjustment (L); and
6. Challenges and Change (Appendix M).

By approaching the data from this angle, layers of the hierarchy were revealed through the process of carefully sifting through the student responses through the lens of the research questions and guided by themes created in the first level of data analysis to search for the common connections among the student perceptions. The progression of this analysis eventually led to a dynamic hierarchy of academic and social influences that inspired decisions of persistence among the students in the study.

### **Interview Protocol: Motivation/ Commitment/ Goals**

During the interview process, participants were asked several specific questions pertaining to their initial and continuing commitment and motivation:

- Why did you initially chose this college and what characteristics initially appealed to you?
- How did you identify with the norms/beliefs of the university and how has this changed?
- Do you intend to drop out of college after this semester or transfer? (why?) and have your initial perceptions of the university changed? (how)?
- Describe how committed, motivated, and confident you are to continue to attend college and
- Have your academic goals changed since you've been here (how)?

These questions were purposefully selected for the protocol to enable the researcher to triangulate meanings uncovered from the data collection process by cross-comparison across the individual student cases. Synopses of these responses were recorded in a Microsoft Word table (Appendix H), Initial and Continuing Commitment to Persist.

*Commitment* and *Motivation* were two of the themes identified during the open coding process. Through examination of the responses pertaining to questions aimed directly toward issues of commitment and motivation, the following observations came to light.

### **Campus Location/ Close to Home/ Family Influence**

Five of the students specifically cited the *campus location* as a primary motivating factor in choosing to attend the university and as a deciding factor in their decision to persist at the university. Therefore, the theme *Campus Location* was collapsed under *Motivation* and *Commitment*. Specifically, one reason BG was drawn to the campus was: “just the area around here, and the weather and stuff.” NL was also drawn to the beauty of the area, saying: “I knew that it is quite beautiful here; it’s a private university.” BW liked the campus location because she is familiar with the Charleston area and said: “Actually, this is the only place I applied to because I just went to high school right across the street at Northwood Academy.” When asked if she intended to drop out or transfer to another college, BW also said: “I’m not going to drop out; but, I was thinking about going to a different one—but, I don’t think I will. I have fun and it’s close to home.” “Initially...,” said JM, “I wanted to go to Clemson.” However, he chose this campus location, in part, saying: “At the same time I wanted to stay local—and it was close to home.” NS echoed a similar opinion, saying: “I chose Charleston because it is close to where I live. Charleston is just a great city!” LC also found the location of the campus appealing, saying: “One thing that got me here was the city of Charleston. My mother was attracted to the Christian environment and (she) fell in love with the campus.” From these comments, it was discerned that the students’ attraction to the

location of the campus was also tied to *Family Influence*; therefore, *Close to Home* was collapsed within *Family Influence* and *Family Influence* moved beneath *Motivation and Commitment*.

### **Campus Atmosphere**

When asked about how their initial perceptions of the university had changed or why they had chosen to persist at the university, several of the students spoke with admiration about the generally caring atmosphere of the campus. For example, this from BT: “From the people I’ve seen so far they have been very kind, especially the students. They don’t really discriminate or do something that would be against what I think.” BT went on to compare the social atmosphere of the campus to a “family environment,” saying: “It’s like everybody is kin to each other. It didn’t matter what happened—we just melded well.” RH also referenced the campus to a caring community, saying: “It’s very encouraging here. I don’t think I’d get that at another college.” RH went on to say: “I was expecting it to be way smaller, but I like that it’s a little bigger—you don’t know everybody on campus. You’re constantly meeting new people.” JM offered this opinion about the campus atmosphere: “I was surprised—the truth, the realness of it. Everybody is supportive. I didn’t really think it was going to be as—*close*.” In addition, LC noted this about the general atmosphere about the campus, saying: “Here, they know you by name and check up on you and give you all these resources. At a bigger school you’re just like a number.” Based on comments like these, *Campus Atmosphere*, *Relationships*, and *Mentoring* were collapsed under *Motivation and Commitment*. In addition, *Friends* and *Mentoring* were placed beneath *Relationships*.

## **Financial Need/ Scholarships/ Sports**

Financial assistance emerged as a motivating influence for *initial and continuing commitment* to the university for some of the students. For example, BT made this claim: “The reason why I chose this place is because it helped me financially.” The offer of financial assistance was also a mitigating factor for DL’s choice to attend the university, who said: “I received a call from the school about a scholarship and it fit me best.” Financial assistance in the form of an athletic scholarship motivated NS, who said: “I initially decided to come here because I am on a soccer scholarship.” When asked why she had chosen to persist at the university, NS followed with: “obviously, for soccer; but I think I fit in really well here—like with the education and the spiritual aspect. *I think it just fits.*” For NS, the dual opportunities of playing for her sport and receiving a scholarship for that participation helped to solidify her *motivation* and *commitment* to persist at the university. The theme *Sports* was also referenced as a compelling draw to the university beyond its benefit to active team participants; for example, JM said that one of reason he chose to attend the university was the fact that the college had “good athletics.”

When asked about her Motivation to persist at the university, NL said: “It’s very high! I know that I earned this athletic scholarship. I am just thankful that I got this opportunity, so I really want to graduate and use this opportunity. I have both academic and athletic scholarships.” When asked if she might decide to transfer or drop out of college, SB cited her opportunity to play softball. Also weighing heavily toward her decision was the relationships she had made with her softball teammates, as revealed by

this: "...and then I have my softball girls with me and we're all really close and that's good!" These comments led to a decision to place *Scholarships* beneath *Financial Need*, and then to place *Financial Need* under *Motivation* and *Commitment*. In addition, the theme *Sports* was collapsed beneath *Relationships*, which was located under *Campus Environment*.

### **Religious Faith**

For BG, an intriguing aspect to the university that influenced his decision to attend was "its Christian ways." He went on to say: "I mean, I came from a Christian background, but like, I wasn't in church every Sunday. Here you got Chapel every Wednesday—I'm catching on to it." In part, coming from a Christian background made integrating into the rhythm of the university a smooth transition for NS, according to this: "If I came in here not having a basic Christian belief system I think I would be really lost—*faith* is integrated into all of it." However, the prominence of Faith as an influential element to the *campus atmosphere* was not universally referenced in a positive light, as demonstrate by the comment from LC:

...and the Christian beliefs? Sometimes I feel it's genuine—it feels a little phony sometimes. With some students it feels phony. You'll have a student up on the stage at Chapel preaching and singing and stuff and then you see that same person around campus and you smile and they look the other way or roll their eyes. As a Christian, you're supposed to love everybody.



Mostly, though, the students conveyed an affirmative view of the *faith* element to the campus environment as a good thing; for example, this from DL: “I feel like being at a Christian university just allows you to have that connection with God and also use Him to be successful in life.” NL also confirmed the strong influence of the university’s *faith* component as a mitigating factor of *motivation* and *commitment*, according to this:

It’s different because it’s a Christian university and it’s more the Christianity than any school at home. People are more friendly. They’re more likely to help me if I have problems because of their faith. It just feels like a big community here.

### **First Generation in College**

Being the first in their immediate family to succeed in obtaining a college degree became a passionate driving force behind the motivation underpinning the spirit of commitment demonstrated by these students. For example, this from DL:

I felt like I have to do it for my family, you know? Being the first one, everybody is looking up to me—brothers and sisters looking up to me. So, it’s more on me because they want to see me succeed; they want me to be their first one in the family to do it. Go all four years in college.

In their part as first-generation college students, several of the students expressed feeling some pressure to become a role model for the rest of the family; in fact, SB said:

I want to be a good role model for him (brother) and please my family. I also have five nieces and nephews and they all look up to me. They’re all like “Where are you at? I want to see you.” And, I’m like “I’m in college!

The influence of family as a motivating force was evident from multiple angles; for example, BW said: “I see how my parents didn’t go and they’ve always regretted it. I definitely want to stay in it.” NS also derived significant motivation from her family circumstances, as evidenced by these comments:

I really want to succeed at college. My dad’s one of the reasons. He works in construction and he is miserable. He doesn’t make enough money, and that keeps me motivated. My Mom is struggling because she’s not getting money from him. So, that’s motivating me to want to be successful and not have to depend on someone else to support me anymore.

RH echoed the ardent expressions of her fellow first-generation classmates, saying: “It’s been a big help, actually, because my mom only got her GED; but, I don’t want to tell my kids ‘*I got my GED*’. I want to say ‘*I graduated from this college*’ and I want them to have a chance to go to the college I graduate from.” However, the family stimulus associated with being a first-generation college student wasn’t entirely a positive motivational stimulus; as portrayed by these comments from BW:

My family—they don’t really know everything that goes on in college. They just compare it to high school and stuff, so it’s not like they can tell me everything about it. They just don’t understand how the classes go—the schedules and stuff. They just can’t really relate. They’ve never experienced it, so they don’t know everything that goes on and stuff. That’s hard.

### **Interview Protocol: Academic Adjustment**

Another section in the interview protocol was aimed to learn about the students' perceived academic adjustment. For example, they were asked:

- How has the academic adjustment to college been so far?
- How have your classes been going compared to how you thought they would be?
- How would you rank your academic ability right now compared to the other students in your classes?
- What academic areas are you doing well in right now?
- What academic concerns do you have at this time?

Student responses were recorded in a Microsoft Word table, *Academic Adjustment*, for easy visual comparison (Appendix I). In addition, students were asked several questions regarding their knowledge of and usage of the various academic support services offered at the university. Careful scrutiny of these responses resulted in the discernment to expand the theme *Academic Issues* by merging it, in part, with the theme *Decision-Making* and creating three separate sub-themes. *Academic Issues* became *Academic Decision-Making* and its three sub-components were called (a) Academic Preparedness, (b) Academic Efficacy and Confidence, and (c) Academic Goals. The theme *Academic Decision-Making* was located beneath the themes *Motivation* and *Commitment*.

### **Academic Decision-Making**

Student responses to the academic questions were cross-checked with (a) their responses to queries about their knowledge and usage of academic support, (b)

independent confirmation of their usage of academic support, (c) their mid-term and final grade reports and (d) early alert submissions. Triangulating this information brought forth some surprising dynamics. In some cases, students who voiced a *lack* of academic confidence ended the semester with good grades, while others who claimed *high* confidence were likely disillusioned upon receiving their final grade report. In some cases, students who were the most “high-risk” based on their academic profile and demographics out-performed others whose academic profiles were more robust. At mid-term, some of the students received poor grades and vowed to change their study habits and seek academic assistance. In the final analysis some of the students who seemed quite motivated to “turn it around” did not achieve this goal; whereas, others who seemed to be struggling the most were among those whose semester ended in a personal victory. In other cases, there was a clear linear path between goals, behavior, and outcome. Discerning these findings led to the conclusion that the individual academic outcome of each student was influenced by three things: (a) academic preparedness, (b) academic goals, (c) academic confidence and efficacy, and (d) academic decision-making. More specifically, the level of college preparedness, along with the confidence and drive to set and meet academic goals seemed to influence the efficacy of the academic decisions made by these students.

### **Academic Preparedness**

One-half of the students in this study were accepted into the university by way of the *Bridge Program* that required them to satisfactorily complete remediation in either math or English—or both. The SAT scores for these Bridge students ranged from a low

of 770 to a high of 980. SAT scores for the *Non-Bridge* students ranged from a low of 910 to a high of 1200. In addition, 80% of the Bridge-accepted students attended high schools where the proportion of minority and economically disadvantaged students exceeded thirty percent, versus 67% for the group, as a whole. Final grade point average for the Bridge group was 2.11, versus 2.27 for the Non-Bridge group, with a standard deviation of only 1.21 between the two sets of scores. While the Non-Bridge group may have entered college better prepared, academically, the difference between the final grades for the two groups was surprisingly minor.

When asked how her classes were going, versus what she had expected, RH, one of the Bridge-accepted students said: “I thought I would be *clueless* about everything in college.” Conversely, BW, a Non-Bridge student, replied to the same question with: “I thought I would be doing a little *better* in my classes.” Interestingly, RG, who was not accepted as a Bridge student, but who had an SAT score lower than some of the Bridge students also anticipated being “clueless” in college.

### **Academic Goals**

NL, who was a Bridge-English accepted student, said:

My goal is to reach my full potential here at the college; I want to have an A in every class. I don't think that it's possible in four years, but that is my goal; I am very ambitious about it!

Indeed, she earned a 4.0 grade point average for her first semester in college. When asked if her academic goals had changed over the semester, RH said that they had not, but added: “I just need to do more studying.” RH, who was accepted as Bridge-math,

finished the semester with a 2.71 grade point average and earned a grade of “B” in her Bridge-required math class. Also accepted as Bridge-English, BH said that his goals had not changed but that he needed to decide “what I want to be when I grow up.” He finished the semester with a dismal 0.19 grade point average and landed on academic probation. Although BH participated in the mandatory Writing Center labs for his English class, he was unable to finish the class with a passing grade. Another Bridge-English accepted student, LC, exclaimed that his goals *had* changed, saying: “I definitely want to do a whole lot better!” LC also used the Writing Center lab, but like BH, failed the class, earning a 1.4 grade point average for the semester and a spot on the academic probation list.

DL, who was required to remediate in both math and English said that his goal was “just to graduate and that hasn’t changed.” He added: “I may struggle sometimes in certain classes, but my goal is to have “A”s and “B”s and it’s looking pretty good right now.” Although DL did not hit that mark, he did post a final grade point average of 2.14—a respectable accomplishment for his first semester, especially in light of the fact that he had the lowest SAT score among the participants. BG, who had an 880 SAT and was accepted as *Full-Bridge* replied: “No; I’m just trying to get eligible for football. If I’m not playing football all four year, I don’t think I’m going to make it.” BG is well on his way to achieving this goal since he completed his math and English classes with a grade of C and finished the semester the semester with a 2.24 grade point average.

RG, who was not required to take any remediation, held: “I just want to be successful!” With a 910 SAT and a 3.28 high school grade point average, perhaps the

potential was greater for him compared to some of the others; however, he earned an “F” in his Math and English classes and ended the semester with a 0.92 grade point average. Although his mid-term grade point average was 1.27, he decided not take advantage of the Writing Lab, Math Lab, or the Learning Center to get some assistance. SB had a 3.26 high school grade point average and the third highest SAT of the whole group. She said: “In high school, I was expecting all “A”s, and here, I’m happy when I get a *B* on a test; I don’t want to say that I’ve lowered by standards...” When asked about her academic adjustment she said: “It’s been really stressful. In World Civ we don’t ever turn anything in—it’s all on tests, and the same for art appreciation—that’s so hard! I’ve never really had to study; school came easy to me.” When asked about specific academic concerns she had, SB said: “just with testing. At first I thought, ‘Ok, I know this;’ then I was like ‘You need to start studying!’ At mid-term SB had a grade point average of 1.38 and a grade of “F” in English, which confirmed the validity of her academic concerns; however, she did not seek assistance at the Writing Center and finished the semester still at 1.38 and had a final grade of “F” in English. Ironically, when asked at mid-term what classes were going well for her, SB said: “I think I am doing pretty good in English.”

BT had the highest SAT among the students, but said this when asked about his academic adjustment: “I was accepted into the Honors Program, but I’m relieved I didn’t take that step. It put such a pressure on me.” He added: “I just wasn’t confident about being in the Honors Program.” At mid-term BT had a 3.72 grade point average, but made this surprising comment about his academic adjustment:

I see that I have to take a step up. I'm still trying to get used to everything.

Thanks to everybody, it's going smoother than I thought. I thought it was going to be a cliff; but really, it's kind of like steps.

Although not required to do so, BT chose to seek assistance at the Writing Center on multiple occasions throughout the semester. He earned an "A" in his English class and finished the semester at a 3.81 grade point average.

When asked about her academic adjustment, BW said: "The first week I so stressed out because I had so much to do." She added: "It's better once you learn to manage your time." Explaining how her classes were going compared to what she expected, BW said: "I thought I would be doing a little better in my classes. It's kind of hard. I'm doing ok. They're definitely two or three classes where I need to step it up." She was among the students who said that she was able to perform well in high school with negligible demand for studying. While discussing her academic goals, BW mentioned: "I wanted all "A"s and "B"s but that's definitely changed because I realized that probably not going to happen, at least not this year." Indeed, at mid-term, BW's grade point average was 1.84; however, she did not seek assistance with either the math or World Civilization classes she was failing at mid-term and earned a final grade of "F" in both of them. In fact, her final grade point average had dropped to a point even lower than the mid-term.

JM, who also claimed to rely little on the need to study in high school and had a mid-term grade point average of 1.27, said this about his academic adjustment:



Oh! It was a shock—definitely. I kind of slipped away in high school and I thought I could slip away with this, but that didn't work. I kind of got myself into a deep hole right now. I don't even want to look at my grades!

Although he did not seek academic assistance, he was able to turn his situation around somewhat so that by the end of the semester, his final grade point average rose to 2.13. JM was also the student in the group who struggled with “focusing” because of diagnosed problem with attention deficit disorder.

Like most of the others, NS said she also didn't have to study much in high school. When asked how her classes were going, NS said: “I like my classes. I am doing a lot better than I thought I would. In high school I thought I wasn't a math person because I would be awful at math, but now I am doing really well.” She went on to say: “I always hated history, but now that's like my highest grade; SI has definitely helped.” At mid-term, NS had a 3.34 grade point average, which correlated with her assessment. Her *choice* to participate with supplemental instruction helped her to earn an “A” in History and a grade point average that improved to 3.81 by the end of the semester. This accomplishment resounded with her comment: “It just shows that if you put time into it you can really do it!”

### **Academic Confidence and Efficacy**

Webster's dictionary defines *efficacy* as “the power to produce a desired effect or result” and *confidence* as “a feeling or belief that you can do something well or succeed at something.” Mingling these two terms with *academics* produces a conception that

illustrates the dynamic interaction between one's personal academic goals and perceived academic ability, and the driving force of motivation to produce academic success.

When asked to compare his academic ability to his peers, BG said: "It isn't as high as it can be because I don't have the necessary tools and stuff—but I am making the best of it. I don't complain about it. *I just get it done.*" BG wasn't able to purchase his own books; he had the lowest SAT; he had a "rough" childhood; yet, he was able to overcome these obstacles by the power of his motivation to achieve his goal of becoming academically eligible to play football.

BT, who had the highest SAT score and was accepted into the Honors Program ranked himself as "a 3 or 4 (*out of 5*).” Describing himself, BT said: "I am doing better than average. I am doing a little bit better than some of the other students, I think. I see other students looking at the phone or just stop paying attention. I think I'm more focused." While BT's confidence was not as high as it should have been, he sought academic assistance with his writing to ensure that he could produce the best possible outcome for his English class."

JM, who struggled with his ability to stay on-task because of a diagnosed attention deficit disorder, offered this when asked to rank his own academic ability: "In some ways, I think everybody has some kind of handicap; but if they apply themselves—they can have great potential!" He went on to acknowledge that he saw "...a lot of other kids not struggling with writing and math as much as me, but math—I just need to study more." He also admitted that he saw other people "...studying for hours and hours and I barely study." He then added: "So, I think if I study, I'd be an extraordinary student!"

Granted, a final grade point average of 2.13 is not *extraordinary*; but, JM's motivation to produce good results enabled him to significantly advance from a 1.25 at mid-term.

NL, who was in the Bridge Program because English is her second language, said this about her Bridge English class: "In my English class I am the best, even though it's not my first language." She followed with: "I think I am more ambitious than the others. I really do all the exercises, studying, and some of them are just a little bit lazy." When asked about her academic ability, NL said: "...and in the other classes, I know there are people who don't attend classes or just come in late 15 minutes all the time and I just try to be on time to do my stuff. I think I am over average in most of the classes." NL used the services of the Writing Center to help strengthen her English skills and was the only one of the whole group who earned a perfect 4.0 for the semester.

When asked about her academic ability, BW said: "I feel like other people are just naturally smart. My friends—they'll sit down and study for an hour and they'll get a good grade. I'll study for an hour and get a C." While she went on to acknowledge that she needed to study more, especially in light of her low mid-term grades, her actions demonstrated a lack of motivation to follow through with her own good advice and she ended the semester on academic probation. When asked about her academic ability, NS said: "I think it's pretty high up there." She added:

Some people won't put in the effort, like my roommate—she's smart, but she doesn't go to class and she doesn't study. I'm not smarter than her; but, I am putting the effort in and she's not. That's what it comes down to, I think—if you want to succeed, then you will.

These comments from NS support the notion that motivation may be a significant explanatory factor to the equation of academic success.

LC said: “As far as raw ability—I’d say we’re all balanced. I wouldn’t say I was doing as good as everybody else, but my ability is good as everybody else. I think we’re all of the same level—same potential.” Unfortunately, LC was unable to demonstrate his capability, judging from his poor grades in the fall semester. The fact that LC also worked 35 hours per week in addition to being a full-time student may have played an extenuating role in his inability to live up to his potential. He said: “Some stuff I just wasn’t able to keep up with and some stuff I was just slacking. I think, mainly, I was slacking. Like, I would study but I would miss some classes because of a work schedule.” LC took responsibility for his fault in the matter by admitting he would sometimes forget to tell a supervisor what his school priorities would be for the week, resulting in him being scheduled for work when he should have been in class.

When asked how she compared with her peers, SB said:

I think I am average. I don’t want to say that I am smarter than all of them, but I know that I am not less smart. I would say that I fit in with them. So, I feel like we are all on the same page as each other and we’re all like, overwhelmed.

Indeed, many of the students declared some level of stress over what they described as an unanticipated heavy academic load, compared to what they were used to in high school. In SB’s case, however, her stress did not serve as motivation to get the academic assistance she knew she needed.

When asked about his academic ability, BH confidently replied: “I never want to say that I feel like I’m ahead of people, but when it comes to math that’s my subject.” He went on to say: “In some classes I feel positive about it. I feel like I am doing better than some other students.” These remarks are contradictory to his actual performance for the semester; at 0.19, BH had the lowest final grade point average of the whole group. In addition, despite the confidence in his math abilities and complimentary remarks about his math professor, BH completed his math class with the grade of D. Interestingly, BH had this to say when asked about how he thought his classes were going: “If you miss a day you will be alerted about it. It’s upon yourself to get your work done instead of a teacher saying, ‘Oh, you missed it’.” In the end, perhaps, BH had simply struggled to muster the motivation necessary to get the job done.

### **Interview Protocol: Social Adjustment**

Webster’s dictionary defines *social* as “relating to or involving activities in which people spend time talking to each other or doing enjoyable things with each other.” Applying this term to the college environment, social interaction can take place as student-to-student, student-to-faculty, student-to-staff, and student-to-institution. The final series of questions in the interview queried the students’ perceptions of their social adjustment over the time they had been on campus. Specifically, they were asked:

- Has it been a big social adjustment for you? Why or Why not?
- How do you think you have been fitting in socially, so far?
- How did you find out about the social opportunities available on campus?

- Have you found it easy or difficult to form relationships with other students on campus?
- Have you interacted with any faculty members outside of class? What happened or Why not?
- How socially active do you think you have been this semester?

The students were also asked about other specific involvement in campus life, such as participation at sporting events, cultural events, or other recreational events sponsored by the University.

Student responses were recorded in a Microsoft Word table, *Social Adjustment*, for easy visual comparison (Appendix L). Careful scrutiny of these responses *resulted* in the discernment to expand the theme *Social Issues* by merging it, in part, with the theme *Decision-Making* and creating three separate sub-themes. *Social Issues* became *Social Decision-Making* and its three sub-components were called (a) Social Preparedness, (b) Social Efficacy and Confidence, and (c) Social Goals. The theme *Social Decision-Making* was located beneath the themes *Motivation* and *Commitment*.

### **Social Decision-Making**

Responses to questions specifically pertaining to the students' social adjustment experiences were cross-checked with other responses from the interview protocol pertaining to questions about:

- Who has had an impact on your perceptions about the university?
- Who has had an impact on your decision to choose a major?
- Who has helped or supported you through challenges you faced at the university?

- Who has had the greatest impact on you during our first semester at the university?
- Who at the University has had a significant impact on you during your first semester at the university?

Discerning these findings led to the conclusion that the individual social well being of each student was influenced by four things: (1) social preparedness; (2) social goals; (3) social confidence and efficacy; and (4) social decision-making. More specifically, the level of social preparedness, along with the confidence and desire to seek healthy social connections and embrace the larger social community seemed to influence the efficacy of the social decisions made by these students. Of course, the social prospects are two-pronged, as new freshman have the opportunity to develop and benefit from relationships not only with their peers, but also with the university's faculty, staff, and coaches.

### **Peer Engagement**

Social interaction among college peers can contribute to overall healthy integration into college life or it can become a source of distraction that may inhibit positive student adjustment. For example, BH, a commuter student said: "For me to make friends, it's not hard. My mom says I have too many friends sometimes." Finding it easy to make friends in college is a good thing; however, it was interesting to note, in the case of BH, that he was also the student in this study who finished the semester with lowest grade point average. SB, one of the student athletes in the study, had this to say about her level of social activity: "*I think I've been a little too socially active!* I'm really friendly. I'll go and hang out with other girls—even if she's someone I don't know." Of

course, having an active college social life would generally be considered a positive thing; however it is intriguing to note that, SB, who had a 3.26 high school grade point average, also finished the semester on academic probation. This is not to say that being overly sociable was the sole influence leading to the academic performances of BH and SB. Likely, there were multiple contributing factors. The point to be made here is that a college student's level of social activity has the potential to make a significant impact on healthy college integration.

When asked who had influenced her perceptions of the university, RH gave credit to: "Tracy—she's like a young life leaders that I met over the summer and she goes here. She kind of got me involved with Elevate." BW said this when asked who had the greatest influence on him: "It's probably my friends. I have, like, three friends who keep me accountable for doing all my homework and going to all my classes." However, when asked if she had developed any relationships with faculty or staff, she replied: "I feel like I haven't really talked to any teachers really—just general classes and stuff...I guess I really should." Incidentally, BW was one of the students who had landed on academic probation at the end of the semester. Perhaps if she had included her academic advisor or professors in her accountability group, she may have had a different experience.

When asked who had the greatest impact on him, JM replied: "Well, all my friends will do study groups together—like B and H. So, I guess my peers have had a lot of impact." JM was one of the success stories in this group, having improved his mid-term grade point average from 1.25 to 2.13. NS said that it was "definitely, my soccer team" that made an impact on her. She added: "It's made it a lot easier—because we had



to come in August 4th, so we had a whole 2–3 weeks more than the other kids on campus. So, my soccer my soccer team has really helped and I’ve made a lot of really good friends here.” NS, a student athlete, was one of the few students in the study who had a high grade point average for both her mid-term and final reports.

### **Engagement with Faculty/ Staff/ Coaches**

For young freshmen who are stepping into a new world of responsibilities, opportunities, and challenges, the university faculty, staff, and coaches can wield a tremendous influence in their academic and social development because they are uniquely qualified to offer sage advice, comforting words, and uplifting encouragement. To prosper from the benefit of these resources, however, students have to be willing to both reach out and receive this support.

For example, when asked about the biggest challenge he had faced so far, BT said: “For me, it’s not panicking about everything. I try to do my best and everything, *but it feels like I am doing something wrong—always.*” BT seemed to be expressing a sense of awkwardness in navigating through the newness of the college environment. He went on to say: “But, the staff, the teachers, even people that aren’t really my teachers or my professors—even though I am not in their class at all—they still try to help me about the college itself and also in the lessons that I can’t really catch yet.” BT had a positive experience because he was willing to embrace the support of people who were available and willing to help him.

In contrast, when asked who the greatest influence in his college life was, LC said: “I guess it would be my peers.” He went on to say: “It should have been my

professors, though, if I had been doing more of what I was supposed to be doing—like going to see my professors and studying more.” He then followed with: “But, I think going forward, I’d prefer my professors to have more an effect on me.” These comments from LC, one of the students who had landed on academic probation at the end of the semester, seemed to demonstrate an awareness that choosing not to make a connection with his professors was a poor decision and not in his best interest.

When asked who at the university had made an impact on him, BG said: “Coach W, the DB coach; he comes to talk to me all the time to make sure I stay out trouble and stuff like that. I see them around and they make sure my grades are straight and make sure I stay on top of everything.” Likely, the support of and accountability to these coaches played a mitigating role in BG’s success with raising his grade point average enough to become eligible to play football—which was BG’s earnest goal.

Ironically, BT, who was one of the most academically successful students in the group, also seemed to be the one who struggled the most with self-assuredness. However, BT was also among the students who appeared most willing to reach out and embrace support from faculty and staff. For example, of Professor JB his Freshman Seminar instructor, he said: “She’s been so helpful to me in finding my way to decide on a major.” Although BT was accepted into the Honors Program based on his high school performance and SAT scores, he faced great ambivalence toward taking on that challenge during his first semester and sought the advice of Dr. PB, the Honors Program advisor, who was able to help him come to a decision that give him some peace of mind. Of Dr. B, BT said: “Even though I was only part of the Honors Program for not even the whole

semester—not even half the semester, he assured me that even though I left the program that there was no fear of doing it.”

When asked who at the university had made an impact on her, NS said: “Oh, definitely my coaches and everyone, really, that’s involved with the soccer team.” She added: “We have assistant coaches—not only do they help with soccer, they just keep you on the right track they watch out for you and act like your parents away from home.” Specifically, she gave credit to one of her assistant coaches, saying:

She went here and she played soccer here and I know that she just has really helped me through this whole thing— the first three weeks I was here I was calling my mom and begging her to pick me up. I was just so depressed and I hated it. But, I talked to C about everything and she was able to, like, make me stick it out, basically. So she definitely a really big help and she still is. Like, she is just motivational.

### **Social Preparedness**

In general, the culture of a college campus is characterized by a dynamic fusion of the diversity of its student body, leadership, and the programming that flows from the institution’s particular mission and vision. As a Christian university, the integration of faith is infused throughout this institution’s academic and social programming.

Therefore, part of the integration experience particular to students at this university involved becoming acclimated into a culture whose social norms and programming was inspired by a uniquely Christian philosophy. For the resident students, the social integration experience also involved learning to negotiate amicable relationships with

multiple roommates of varied backgrounds. Still another aspect of the integration experience included being open to forming relationships with faculty, staff, and one's peers. *Social Preparedness* emerged as an analytical element of these students' social integration experience having to do with their openness to embrace the unique social milieu of this particular university.

When asked about his overall adjustment, DL said:

I feel like it's a big adjustment. Here you meet new people every day, different people from all types of places. It's very easy to meet new people. I'm down to earth and love to have fun. *I feel like I fit in.* I love meeting new people. I love new experiences. So, I would have to say, socially I've really been impacted by different people. I felt like being a Christian, we all have the same view as far as believing in God and wanting to be better in God's way. So, I felt like me being around these certain types of people were very beneficial to me and helped me be friendly towards them.

When asked about his greatest challenge faced so far, JM, who is a commuter, replied: "Probably, my biggest my challenge right now—I'm not living on campus. I think for a full college campus experience you should live on campus." JM, who attended a local private Christian high school was eager to become more involved in the social sphere of the University. When asked about his social participation on campus, JM stated that he often attended the weekly student led faith-based program called *Elevate* and also attended the non-denominational church on campus. When asked how he was fitting socially, RG said: "*I think I've been pretty good.* I guess, since I'm in Gospel

Choir, people know me.” BT, another commuter student, stated that he was very involved in the activities of his local church, but when asked about social participation on campus, he said:

I tried going to some student organizations. *I didn't really get into it.* I thought it would be more like a social thing. It felt like more work. It didn't feel like I was supposed to be there. On campus, I guess I am more of a wallflower. I have one or two friends; but, I'm not really big on social activities.

However, BT did say that he was quite involved with social activities of the local church he attends with his family and girlfriend.

When asked about her social adjustment, RH offered: “I'm used to having a big group of friends—but here, it's like a new start because all my friends went to USC or Clemson and no one came here.” When asked about her participation in student organizations, she replied: “I mostly go to *Elevate*; otherwise, I'm not really involved in clubs.” When asked about her biggest challenge, RH said: “I would have to say problems with my roommate; but, the Dean—he helped out a ton! It's resolved now. That was my big challenge here so far.” Interestingly, RH also had this to say when asked how she perceived herself to be changed since she had been at the University: “Well, my roommate problems have made me be more aware of having to get along with other people. That's been a real challenge—dealing with the roommate issue; but, J and A have really helped me out.”

When asked whether his initial beliefs about the university had changed, LC said:

I think I fit in pretty well. They don't ask for much, like the rules and regulation here are kind of what your parents would expect of you. It helps me be a better person. So *I think I fit in with it.*

Responding to the same question, NL said:

It's different because it's a Christian university and it's more the Christianity than any school at home. People are more friendly. They're more likely to help me if I have problems because of their faith. It just feels like a big community here.

NS responded like this: "If I came in here not having a basic Christian belief system I think I would be really lost. Faith is integrated in all of it." BG had this to say: "The Christian ways? I mean I came from a Christian background, but I wasn't in church every Sunday. Here you got Chapel every Wednesday—I'm catching on to it."

Not all students embrace the Christian environment, according to this observation by LC, who said: "Sometimes I feel it's genuine—it feels a little phony sometimes. With some students it feels phony. You'll have a student up on the stage at Chapel preaching and singing and stuff and then you see that same person around campus and you smile and they look the other way or roll their eyes."

### **Social Goals**

Another element that emerged as being a part of the social integration experiences of the students had to do with perceptions of their drive or desire to make healthy social connections and become part of the university's social community. For example, when asked about his social adjustment, JM said: "I actually have been trying to choose better friends, rather than the friends I have back home because some of them aren't the best

influences. I have some that are better than others. But particularly, here, I like to be involved with *Elevate* and students that want the same thing for their lives.” Responding to the same question, NS said:

I just don’t feel afraid to talk to people and I want people to like, get to know me—just know that I am a good person. *I just want to be friends with good people who will help me and not pull me back.*

BG, the student whose overarching goal was to become eligible to play on the university football team, was, at face value, somewhat of an enigma. When asked about his social involvement BG said:

I’m not involved in nothing except for football. To be honest I don’t even try. I just go with the flow. The only people I really hang with is the football team. I just know everybody on the football team. I don’t fit in like that but some people don’t have the same circumstances that I do—just where I came from. I mean I just grew up kind of rough. I lost my daddy at two weeks old, so I never really had a father figure. I mean I grew up doing some crazy stuff.

In addition, when asked who had influenced him most, BG said: “Football that’s about it— football.” On the surface, these comments appeared to indicate a lack of desire to become socially involved in the campus community. However, when viewed from another angle, BG was actually expressing quite a vigorous desire for social involvement, albeit, a very narrowly focused involvement—“*only with football*”.

Several of the students expressed interest in becoming more socially involved, but chose not to pursue that desire because they were concerned about the possibility that

time conflicts between their academic and social priorities could emerge to affect their academic performance. For example, when asked if he had participated in any student organizations, DL said: “No; but once I get used to focusing more on my school work, *I feel like those extra things will come eventually.*” NS, one of the student athletes, replied: “It was really hard to balance everything and I wanted to make sure I was ahead of the game—academically—*so, maybe next semester.*” NL, another student athlete, echoed this, saying:

So far I am not attending any organizations. I want to attend the Psychology Club but I am not able because I have classes at this time. *But it would just be too overwhelming because I really have so much stuff going on because I’m an athlete.*”

When asked if he had attended any cultural events on campus, BT also voiced concerns about jeopardizing his academic studies, saying:

I wish I could. *I wish I actually found time to do that,* cause not only would it be good in finding myself, but just also seeing other cultures as well. I wanted to go to a play on one of the days, *but I was studying so much.*

### **Social Confidence and Efficacy**

The theme *Social Efficacy* was used to articulate instances of the students’ social integration experiences that demonstrated an ability to step out of their “comfort zone” or overcome social challenges. For example RG made this comment when asked about his ability to form relationships with his peers: “It got easier. I thought it was hard the first three days; but, I adjusted because *I knew I wasn’t going to know anyone unless I went up and said something.*”



BT was probably the most socially awkward among the group and had to make a concerted effort to overcome this obstacle. When asked about his ability to form relationships with others, BT tried to put a positive spin on the situation, saying:

Surprisingly, it's been easy, but I blame my personality. I don't know whether it's just me or if it's because of other people; but, I tend to form friendships when I have those random bursts of being extroverted.

RH, who admitted to having a rough time adjusting in the resident hall because of problems with her roommates, said this about her ability to form relationships with others:

“Well, I'm not really involved in any extra activities or clubs, but *I think I'm doing pretty well cause I meet people through Elevate and people I sit next to in Chapel*. I'm social and I will talk to anyone!”

When asked about his greatest challenge at the university, LC said:

I've had struggles because I'm soft-spoken. I'm very private, but I still want to interact and get along with other people. Growing up, I never had friends of a different race, so that was one of my goals when I got here. It didn't go so well until I met my friend Raymond. It's a white guy and that's probably my best friend now. I never imagined myself having a white friend—not only a white friend, but just somebody I'd probably call my brother. So he made my college experience so much better after meeting him.

LC also admitted having difficulties reaching out to others; but his efforts to extend his social comfort zone enabled him to make a meaningful relationship with one of his peers.

SB was one of two the two students in the study who didn't live within driving distance of her home. Although she had a 3.26 grade point average in high school and came to the university on full athletic scholarship, SB had a 1.38 grade point average at mid-term that she was unable to improve and ended the semester on academic probation. These comments from SB suggested a possible link between her social adjustment struggles and her academic performance:

Spiritually, I probably got a lot stronger because it's really been hard because I had to keep praying that everything's going to be ok. And emotionally, I've probably been like—probably cried the most that I have ever cried before.

Because I just get homesick, because I am really close to my family. So, that's probably been the thing that's really hard. I mean emotionally—it's just been hard.

BW, a commuter student, who graduated from a small, private, Christian High School in the area, had this to say when asked about her ability to form relationships on campus:

It was different because in my high school we were really close with our teachers just cause we had such small classes, so it was really easy just to talk to them and have relationships with them. But here, it's a little harder—just because the classes are a little bigger and professors don't always know everybody yet.

Interestingly, BW was one of the students who struggled with her academics and ended the semester on academic probation. Perhaps she could have experienced a different

outcome had she been able to reach out of her comfort zone and make more of an effort to connect with her professors.

#### **Chapter Four Summary**

This chapter outlined the technical and thought processes the researcher used to strategically sift through the layers of the main data source for this study—the student interviews. Multiphase and methodical analysis of the respondents’ dialogue revealed overarching themes to represent the students’ *perceptions* of their academic and social experiences during their first semester at the university. Additional comparison-and-contract analysis of their individual experiences gave voice to subtle and overt meanings to their collective involvement that sharpened the researcher’s clarity for informing a comprehensive explanatory model to articulate the findings of the study.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

#### **Student Motivation to Persist in College**

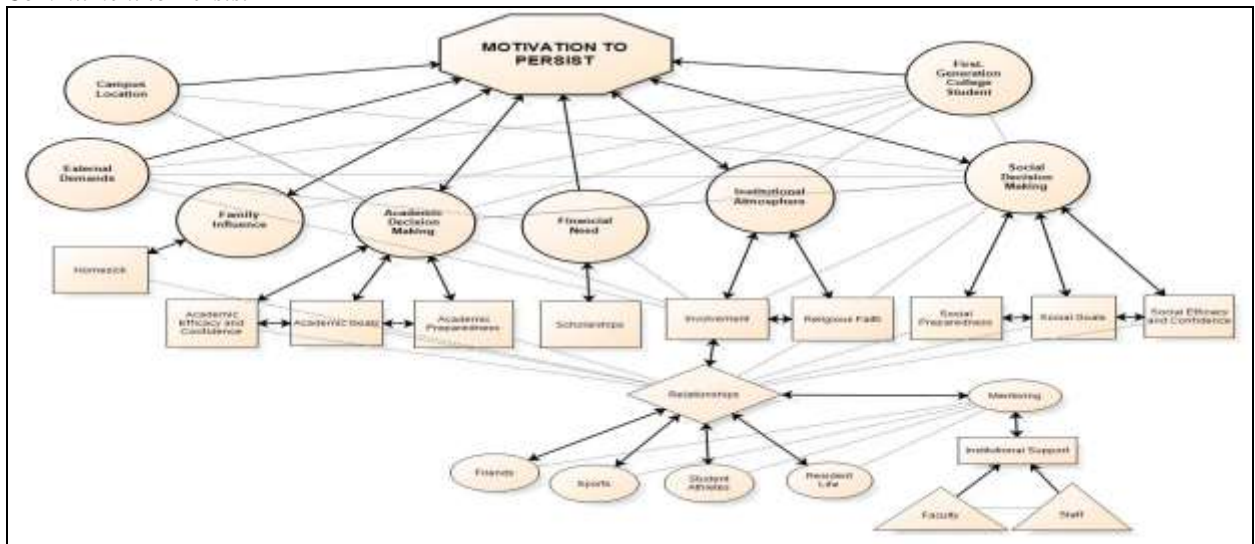
At the heart of research on college student retention is the goal of obtaining a better understanding of the circumstances that influence student decisions to persist or depart from the institution. This particular qualitative, single-institution case study was purposed to gain some clarity as to how individual perceptions of *academic* and *social* integration during the *initial semester* of college for a small group of traditional-aged first-generation freshmen from a less-selective private faith-based institution influenced their decisions to persist into the second semester of college. As was previously noted, only two of the study's twelve participants failed to return to the university for the spring semester. Of further interest was the fact that of the twelve students, five ended the semester with grade point averages that caused them to be placed on academic probationary status for their second semester.

Careful analysis of the student interviews developed out of the hierarchical axial coding, along with student demographic and other institutional data from the returning versus non-returning groups and from the good academic standing versus the probation groups revealed eight major intersecting themes that dynamically interrelated with one another to ultimately impact the whole of student *Motivation to Persist*. Static factors that accompanied these students to the inauguration of their college experience—the geographic venue of the university, their status as first-generation college students, their current work and family demands, their academic and social preparation and confidence,

their religious faith, and their financial circumstances—interacted in variable tandem with facets of the university establishment. This dynamic exchange touched every aspect of their academic and social milieu—from how they related to and were accepted by their peers and the institutional membership, to how they traversed these new academic and social challenges. Interview dialogue exposed how their own perceptions of their academic and social experiences, in turn, shaped the academic and social decisions that motivated actions that propelled the trajectory of their future course at the university.

In due course, the model derived from this research placed individual student *Motivation* at the apex of this hierarchical model. Thus, the model depicts how student decisions to commit to pursuing a degree and persisting at the university into their second semester emerges from their individual motivation to persist. Individual motivation to persist, in turn, develops from a complex exchange of both static and dynamic factors (Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1  
*Commitment to Persist*



### **Returners versus Non-Returners**

In comparing BH and DL, the two non-returners, with the rest of the entire group, several similarities and differences were noted. Both students were eligible to re-enroll for the spring semester and each had indicated his intention to re-enroll. However, neither of them was able to do so because both had an unpaid student account balance with the university, which prohibited their class registration. Other commonalities between the pair—aside from their first-generation in college status—included being male, having minority ethnic status, being from single parent homes, having a high dollar amount of unmet financial aid need, being accepted into the universities' Bridge Program, and having an immediate family living within thirty miles of the university. All of these descriptors are common among first-generation students who fail to persist in college. However, it is the differences *between* these two non-returning students that contributed meaningfully to these findings. Whereas at mid-term, each of the non-returners had a low grade point average, by the end of the semester, BH had a significant drop in his grade point average—from 1.63 down to 0.19. This occurrence landed BH not only on academic probation, but also with the dubious distinction of having the lowest grade point average of the whole participant group. On the other hand, DL significantly improved his grade point average from 1.78 at midterm up to 2.12 by the end of the semester; thus, attaining good academic standing.

What made the difference in their performances so notable was the fact that DL, the one who successfully turned around his low midterm performance was, arguably, the lesser academically equipped student. DL's SAT score of 770 was significantly lower

than BH's score of 910. In addition, DL was required to take remediation for both math and English; whereas, BH only had to take remediation for English. Both students used the Writing Center for academic support. The assistance paid off for DL, who earned a "C" in English; whereas, BH received a grade of "F". The commitment to persist model suggests that DL's achievement can be explained by his personal motivation to persist.

### **Good Standing versus Academic Probation**

Comparing the demographics of the returners who attained good academic standing to those who landed on academic probations led to some unexpected observations.

Table 5.1  
*Academic Factors for Returners on Academic Probation*

Name	Final GPA	Midterm GPA	HS GPA	Bridge Program	Athlete	First Choice	SAT
BW	1.56	1.84	3.05	No	No	Yes	990
LC	1.40	2.54	2.45	English	No	No	940
SB	1.38	1.38	3.26	No	Yes	No	1060
RG	0.92	1.06	3.28	No	No	No	910
BH	0.19	1.63	2.14	English	No	No	910

Table 5.2  
*Financial/Personal Factors for Returners on Academic Probation*

Name	Living on Campus	Minority Status	Single-Parent Home	Received Pell Grant	Unmet Financial Need	Distance from Home
BW	No	Yes	No	Yes	\$9,105	<30 miles
LC	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	\$6,105	220 miles
SB	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	\$3,997	2,000 miles
RG	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	\$14,881	226 miles
BH	No	Yes	Yes	No	\$19,050	<30 miles

Table 5.3

*Academic Factors for Returners in Good Academic Standing*

Name	Final GPA	Midterm GPA	HS GPA	Bridge Program	Athlete	First Choice	SAT
NL	4.00	3.38	3.21	English	Yes	Yes	980
BT	3.84	3.72	4.14	No	No	Yes	1210
NS	3.81	3.34	3.94	No	Yes	Yes	1100
RH	2.71	2.19	3.04	Math	No	No	800
BG	2.24	1.27	2.59	Both	Yes	Yes	800
JM	2.13	1.25	2.62	No	No	Yes	970
DL*	2.12	1.78	2.99	Both	No	No	770

\*Non-Returning Student

Table 5.4

*Financial/Personal Factors for Returners in Good Academic Standing*

Name	Living on Campus	Minority Status	Single-Parent Home	Received Pell Grant	Unmet Financial Need	Distance from Home
NL	Yes	No	No	No	\$6,205	International
BT	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	\$4,201	<30 miles
NS	Yes	No	Yes	No	\$0	98 miles
RH	Yes	No	No	Yes	\$17,784	<30 miles
BG	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	\$11,255	210 miles
JM	No	No	Yes	No	\$5,497	<30 miles
DL*	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	\$13,755	<30 miles

\*Non-Returning Student

Note: Symbol "&lt;" means less than.

For the group ending on academic probation, the grade point average *decreased* by 36% from midterm to final. For students ending in good standing, however, grade point averages *increased* by 23% from midterm to final. This is a particularly thought-provoking finding since fifty percent of *all* subjects required remediation in either math or English; yet, that percentage was seven points *higher* for the group ending in good standing (57%). Among the group ending on academic probation, only forty percent required remediation—ten points *lower* than the average for all participants. In addition, the average SAT score for the group ending in good standing was three points *lower* (959) than for the group ending on probation (962). Results of the study's hierarchical



coding process revealed that individual motivation to persist was greater for the students ending in good academic standing than it was for those ending on academic probation— independent of more objective criteria.

In looking at the total participant pool, 67% were resident students; however, that number was higher (71%) for the group ending in good standing, but lower (60%) for the group ending on academic probation. Whereas only 33% of all participants were student athletes, among the group ending in good standing, that number was significantly higher (43%), and significantly lower (20%) for those on probation. Fifty percent of all participants reported on their questionnaire that this university had been their top choice; however that number was much higher (71%) for the group who finished in good academic standing and much lower for the group who ended on academic probation (20%). The coding process that informed the commitment to persist model clearly revealed that student athletes, for example, were highly motivated individuals. In particular, the student athletes in this study became the showcase for authenticating the impact of healthy peer and administrative mentoring leading to successful academic and social integration.

The average unmet financial aid need for the group of all participants was \$9,320. Comparing that statistic *between groups* revealed that the average unmet need for students ending on probation was 14% *higher* than the whole group average, but 10% *lower* for the group ending in good standing. In addition, 67% all participants received the Pell Grant; however, among the group ending on academic probation that figure was

much higher (83%), but ten percentage points *lower* for the group ending in good standing.

Sixty-seven percent of all the participants emerged from families with a single parent as head-of-household; yet, that percentage for the group in good standing was four points *higher* than the whole group average and seven percentage points *lower* for those on academic probation. Sixty-seven percent of all participants claimed a minority ethnic status; yet, all of the students ending on academic probation were minorities and only 43% were minorities among the group ending in good academic standing. Although the retention literature identified low family income and minority status as risks factor for attrition, results from the study's axial coding process attributed this juxtaposition to individual motivation to persist as a mediating influence in successful academic and social integration.

The grade point averages for all the students in the group placed on academic probation followed the same trend between midterm and the end of the semester; in each case, the final GPA was much *lower* than the midterm. Conversely, with the group who attained good academic standing, the opposite trend was observed in that the final GPAs were significantly *higher* than at midterm. Most interesting about this finding was that the three students who had the greatest increase in GPA between midterm and final also had lowest SAT scores among their group. In fact, the average SAT score for those landing on probation was three points *higher* than for the group attaining good academic standing.

Fifty percent of all the subjects in the study were required to do academic remediation in either (or both) math and English. Oddly, segregating the group by final semester academic standing revealed that the percentage requiring remediation among those who attained “good academic standing” was higher (57%) than for the group placed on academic probation (40%).

### **Commitment and Motivation to Persist**

Student academic expectations reflect the academic aspirations of individual students that mirror the student’s hopes for the future and their perceived likelihood of attaining that future (Tinto, 1993). When asked about his intentions to persist at the institution, JM, a returner in good standing and one who had made significant improvement in GPA between midterm and the final, said: “Oh, very committed. I am going to stick to it until either World War III or the Rapture!” Although said in jest, these words reflected JM’s level of motivation to remain committed to his academic goal of obtaining a degree from the university. Likewise, NS, a returning student athlete who kept a high GPA all semester, said: “I’m planning on staying here until I get a degree in whatever I want to do.” She added: “There’s never been a doubt that I would finish college; that has not changed for me, so far—even though it has been tough.” BW (a returner on academic probation) explained: “I would say I’m really committed. I know I need to do this to get ahead—do what my parent’s didn’t.” This was a common theme among the participants that spoke of a passion to succeed that appeared to emerge from their vantage point of being the first in their families to complete a university degree.

### **Campus Location and Motivation**

Several students indicated that the location of the campus was a unique mitigating factor in their decision to attend and persist at the university. LC (a returner on academic probation) said: “One main thing that got me to come to Charleston Southern was the city of Charleston—especially, I liked the city. Also, my mother was attracted to the Christian environment and she fell in love with the campus.” These comments, uncovered through the axial coding process, reflected the dynamic relationship among the motivating influences of family, and the location of the campus as being close to home. JM echoed these thoughts, saying: “I think it’s a beautiful campus and it’s close to home.” Likewise, NS said:

I chose Charleston because, I don’t know, like, Charleston is close to where—I live 2 hours from Charleston, and it was just—not only the campus beautiful—Charleston is just a great city all around, so that made it a lot easier!

### **External Demands and Motivation**

External issues, such as work and family crises that drew students’ time, energy and attention away from studying, were also major factors that influenced students’ motivation to engage, both academically and socially. For example, when asked about his level of social activity, LC (a commuter) said: “Not very much; I work at Foot Locker. I don’t often have time to just sit in the dorms with my friends.” He also indicated that his work schedule impeded his ability to make time to take advantage of academic support services available to students, saying: “I guess that’s why I struggled; I’ll go now!” SB (a

returning athlete on academic probation whose family lives in California) credited her motivation to persist, in part, to the external demands of her family, saying:

I have really strong motivation because of my mom and my dad—and my little brother is 16 and he’s getting into a lot of trouble right now. I want to be a good role for him and please my family.

Results of the axial coding process reflected the dynamic relationship of motivation to family influence and being a first-generation college student. BH, one of the students unable to re-enroll due to an unpaid student account balance, also faced an additional encumbrance to his persistence as he had found out during his first semester in college that he (unexpectedly) was to become a father.

### **Family Influence and Motivation**

Family was talked about in a number of contexts. Students talked about family in terms of their current and past social contexts, family cultural issues, family financial issues, family support, or lack of understanding. For example, when asked about fitting in socially, BG (the ineligible athlete who made a big “comeback” between midterm and final) said:

*I don’t fit in like that, but some people don’t have the same circumstances that I do so—just where I came from. I mean, I just grew up kind of rough. I lost my daddy at two weeks old, so I never really had a father figure. I mean, I grew up doing some crazy stuff.*

SB (whose family lives in California), had the same low GPA at the midterm and final; yet, said her motivation to persist in college was: “Way up there because I just have

family things going on and just all this kind of stuff—so I want to graduate!” RG (one of the returners on academic probation whose GPA took a “nosedive” between midterm and finals) said: “My mom—she calls me a lot and just tells me how hard I have to work and how much college is important. She just keeps telling me.” He also said: “I am very committed. *Like, that’s all I want to do. Just make my parents proud—make a better life for me.*”

RH (one of the returners who made a significant improvement in GPA between midterm and final and the only one in the study to earn Advancement Placement credit) said that the university had not been her first choice, but: “*It was local and close to home—and my Dad wanted me to be close to home—and I don’t think I was ready to be gone.*” She also spoke of the support of her family as providing motivation, saying: My motivation is, my dad always told us—me, my brother and sister—‘If you want to do this’, I’ll support you, pay for anything, for any class you do.

The axial coding process revealed that Family influence often overlapped with the aspect of being first in the family to graduate college. For example, SB spoke of being close to her family, but also shared: My mom can’t relate exactly how hard it is, and I have no other family members that have been to college to tell her anything. It’s just like ‘mom’, it’s way harder than you think!

DL (one of the non-returners who could not pay off his student bill) expressed feelings of pride and pressure from the influence of his family by saying: *I felt like I have to do it for my family, you know? Being the first one, everybody is looking up to me—brothers and sisters looking up to me.*

## Academic Decision Making and Motivation

It was surprising that several students in this study who had academic problems in college reported doing well academically in high school. Doing well in high school and poorly in college had a number of negative effects on students' self-esteem and also their comfort with seeking help. For example SB (who had a 3.26 GPA in high school) said: For me it's been really stressful—like, *I've never really had to study because school just came really easy to me*. I just did my work and I would pass the class. Although SB did seek assistance with supplemental instruction on a couple of occasions, her declaration of “probably being too socially active” suggested she was also struggling with how to accomplish efficacy when making choices in how to manage her time within the boundaries of her new independence. On the other hand, DL (who had a 2.99 high school GPA) seemed to have a better understanding of effective time management, saying:

I've started something different than I did in high school. I mark down everything I need to do, what I need to do, when it needs to be turned in. So, I have pretty much a whole calendar, basically, of what I need to do, when it due is, and stuff like that to help me.

When asked why he had not taken advantage of any academic support services, RG (who had a high school GPA of 3.28 but ended up on probation) said: “I've honestly been nervous. I don't know why. *I just get nervous—think I'm not supposed to go at a certain time*. I didn't know if they accepted walk-ins—that's all.”

## Financial Need and Motivation

Several aspects of financial need emerged from the axial coding process and the institutional data collected in this study. In some cases, financial aid or scholarships became a primary motivating factor in the decision to attend the university. In other cases, the theme of financial need emerged from discussions about their future goals, providing motivation for them to aspire to “do what their parents didn’t do” by graduating from college and having the opportunity to develop a greater level of financial stability than their own families had been able to achieve.

It was financial need that motivated SB to attend the university, based on the offer of an athletic scholarship, she said: “And then, I got offered a full ride to come here, so I really liked that!” NL (the international student athlete who finished the semester with a 4.0 GPA) described how financial support affected her level of motivation to succeed, saying:

It’s very high; *I know that I earned this athletic scholarship and it would just be—I am just thankful that I got this opportunity*, so I really want to graduate and use this opportunity. I have both academic and athletic scholarships.

NS (another athlete with a high GPA) echoed the same sprouting of motivation, inspired by financial need, according to these comments: “I initially decided to come to this university because I am here on a soccer scholarship. *It was easy to make the decision because—who would pass up going to college for basically free—especially now days?*” BT (a returner who had the highest GPA in high school, yet seemed the most unsure of himself) was also lured to the university by a scholarship; he said: *The most definite*



*reason why I chose this place is because it helped me financially*—because of the scholarship, and my church—a lot of people there came from the University.

The coding process further exposed how family influence and status as a first generation student also connected with the theme financial need, as in these comments from RG (whose family lives over 200 miles from the university): “I am very committed. Like, that’s all I want to do. *Just make my parents proud; make a better life for me.*” NS (whose family lives almost 100 miles from the university) said:

I really want to succeed at college and my dad’s one of the reasons why—because he works in the construction business and he is on his hands and knees all day and he’s miserable. Then my mom—who is also struggling because my dad is (they are divorced), so she’s not getting any money from him. *So, that’s like motivating me to want to be successful and not have to depend on someone else to support me anymore.*

In the case of BG (whose family lives a little over 200 miles away), issues pertaining to financial need morphed into a major source of stress, based on these comments:

*The biggest problem is I don’t have any of my books.* It’s just cause the financial aid—I haven’t got my bill covered (unmet financial aid need of over \$11,000).

Mrs. H, she is trying to help me. We’re trying to get some more financial aid. With the assistance of his academic advisor and the director of financial aid, BG was, eventually, able to secure the necessary financial aid he needed to quell these concerns.

### **Institutional Atmosphere and Motivation**

The hierarchical coding process used in this study showed how all of the students were influenced and motivated by various aspects of the cultural fabric of the campus community. The academic, social, and institutional cultures of the university community overlapped one another to create a wide sphere of motivating influences to shape, not only the way these students engaged with each other, in and outside the classroom, but also the level to which they were open to engaging with the faculty, staff, and institutional resources. Interestingly, the students often drew into the conversation their perceptions of how the cultural element of the university's religious faith was intertwined with various aspects of their academic and social experiences.

Most of the students openly credited individuals at the university as mentors in helping them to progress through multiple phases and aspects of personal growth. For example, LC (a resident student) credited his academic advisor as someone who had helped him to learn more about his major and feel more comfortable with that decision. LC also mentioned his Freshman Seminar professor as a person who helped him get on track with deciding on a major, saying: "I ended up changing my plan because I realized how hard college can be and I wanted it to be worth-while in the end, so I'm just going with a more reliable field. *Professor B—she helped with that.*" RG, another resident student, credited his resident hall assistant as someone who had helped him feel welcomed, saying: "*Well, my RA—G, he's a cool person and he helped me get adjusted to college.*" RG then added "And I'm in Gospel Choir and CM—he helped me out a lot, too. *They've both been like big brothers.*"

Although BT (a commuter) was one of the most academically gifted students in the study, he struggled with various elements of academic and social insecurity and spread the credit far and wide for helping him to feel more secure. He said:

*People that helped me were probably just the teachers and some of my friends—all of them trying to get me to relax and try to be confident in myself—confident that I can actually get through all of this. Like, through my work, through studying, and like trying to balance myself out—all of the responsibilities.*

Another strong theme that emerged from the coding process was the students' motivation—derived from their perceptions of the way in which the element of faith was integrated throughout the university. For example, RG (a resident student and a returner) said: "I knew it would be, like, a Christian university; and I honestly thought it would be a Christian university; but, *I thought professors wouldn't really be saying anything about it— wouldn't integrate it with their lesson. But they did; and so that was nice.*" JM (a commuter and returner) added:

*This is a Christian college. I was surprised—the truth, the realness of it. We have great pastors, great faculty, everybody is supportive. I like this school. I didn't really think it was going to be as. I didn't think it would be so—close.*

SB (a returning resident student and athlete) talked about how the religious culture of the university influenced her decision to attend the university, saying:

*I like the school a lot because it's—I actually wanted to go to a smaller school. I grew up in a really religious home and I was a strong Christian, so I really like that. I like how we have to go to Chapel and how there's a church on campus.*

For SB, the faith element of the school and the relationships she formed through her association with athletics made a significant impact on her integration experience, saying: *“I came here because—softball probably, and then I really like how it’s a Christian school.* Again, it’s the two main reasons. And then, I have my softball girls with me and we’re all really close, and that’s good.” In particular, SB credited the support from her teammates and coaches for making the adjustment process go more smoothly, saying:

The softball girls, they’re telling me about tutoring—and my coach is also telling me about tutoring and the Learning Center and all that stuff. A lot of them have already taken the classes I’m taking and they already know a lot of it, too, so I can go to them, and if they didn’t know it, I know I can go to tutoring.

Although obviously aware of the academic assistance available to her, SB made little use of these resources and was the only athlete in the study to end the semester on academic probation.

LC (a resident returning student) articulated his perceptions of the university’s faith culture this way:

I honestly say that at this university, the professionals here are ethically balanced. *They don’t treat you any different—no matter what color you are.* I can’t say that I’ve had issues with any professionals here. Not even down to the cleaners at the cafeteria. *Here, they know you by name and check up on you and give you all these resources.*

NL (another returning resident and athlete) expressed how she perceived the university's faith culture to inspire the people on campus to be kind and helpful to one another, saying:

It's different because it's a Christian university and it's more the Christianity than any school at home (Germany). It's what I experienced that people are more friendly. *They're more likely to help me if I have problems because of their faith.* It just feels like a big community here.

Based on student comments, sports, in general, and athletic participation, specifically, emerged as a strong conduit to helping students build relationships across campus. For example, DL (a resident student who had made many friends on campus) said that he had participated in the football intramurals. Through that association, he developed a relationship with the director of the program and credited him as being someone on campus who had a significant impact on his perceptions of the university, specifically adding: *"Yeah—the director over there at the Brewer Center, he's been really helpful to me."*

The student athletes in the study placed significant emphasis on the value of their involvement with teammates and coaches to provide friendship and mentoring. For example, SB said: "My coach—he's helped me out a lot. *I thought he was just going to be my coach—like, just softball coach; but, he's also been there to talk to about personal stuff, like me being homesick and stuff.*" The depth and importance of this relationship was especially evident in these comments, as SB continued:

He didn't say like, "What's wrong?" or anything, but he saw that I was a little upset and he was, like "I'm here if you need to talk to me." And, "I know you don't have your dad here." And "I know that he was one of the persons you always talk to." And "You don't have your mom...I could be your dad here if you want." He just made me feel that I could talk to him about stuff.

Although he was not currently academically eligible to play with the football team, the relationships BG had built with the players and coaches served as powerful motivation for him to reach his goal of raising his grade point average to where he could become an active participant. BG made a point to stay involved as much as he could, often attending practices and working out with the team players. He admitted it was very hard, saying: "But when I see my teammates and stuff they're like 'Yeah (BG), we want you to come back;' and the coaches are like 'We want you to come back; you contributed to the team'." BG added: "*It just made me want to stay more.*" BG also demonstrated his strong motivation to reach his academic and social goals by the way he handled the financial aid problem that kept him from purchasing his textbooks until late in the semester, saying: "It's been hard. I don't have the necessary tools and stuff. Yeah, but I am making the best of it. *I don't complain about it. I just get it done.*" He put his motivation into action by seeking out the help of his academic advisor to help him figure out how to negotiate with the Financial Aid Office to get the additional financial aid he needed.

Although most of the students admitted having very limited out-of-class contact with their professors, the students referenced their in-class interactions in very positive terms. For example, LC (a commuter) said of one professor:

For math, I have a really good professor. She's not like, you know, really—she doesn't baby you or anything; but I think she's a really, really good professor when it comes to teaching and making you understand the material and *making you understand that she is there for you*.

Although ending the semester on academic probation, LC did manage to pass his math class with the help of his professor and tutoring at the Math Lab.

### **Motivation and Social Decision Making**

The progression of hierarchical coding further voiced how the student athletes in the study spoke most avidly about relationships with their peers and campus mentors. In particular, the bonds athletes formed between teammates and with their coaches seemed especially salient in fostering positive social adjustment.

Of the three resident students in the study who expressed feelings of homesickness, one lived within two hours driving distance, another lived on the opposite coast, and the third had travelled from another country. It was interesting to note from the comments of these three students that the distance from their homes did not seem to mediate their level of homesickness. The student living two hours away spoke as emotionally about missing home as the international student. Also noteworthy was the fact the all three of these students were recruited to play competitive sports on campus. Again, in all three cases, the students spoke with appreciation of how their perspective

teammates and, especially, their coaches provided invaluable nurturing support to ease the emotional transition of separating from their families.

All of the students enjoyed attending various campus sporting events, to some extent, and many of them admitted to participating in least one other recreational or cultural event hosted on campus. Conversely, most of the students spoke tentatively about getting involved with student organizations on campus; the most commonly cited reason was the anticipation that the commitment might create an excessive distraction to their studies. However, a few of them did express the expectation that getting involved with student organizations was something they planned to do after they felt assured that their studies were “on track.”

The coding process was useful to identify how the pressure of external demands detracted from the willingness of these students to seek social involvement on campus. Student athletes, especially, cited that competing priorities of academic studies and mandatory athletic practices posed an excessive demand on their time available to become more socially active on campus.

Oddly, several students reported that they had not been very sociably involved on campus, yet they reported regular attendance at either the campus church or *Elevate*, a weekly Christian worship program. From the coding, we saw this viewpoint appear consistently among the students, regardless of resident status, returning status, or academic standing.

A couple of the students expressed the viewpoint that their level of social engagement had become a distraction to their academic studies. Two of the students



articulated an expressed goal to develop more beneficial friendships. For example, NS (a returning athlete who ended the semester with a 3.94 GPA) said: *“I just want to be friends with good people who will help me and not pull me back.”*

### **First Generation College Student and Motivation**

One of the most poignant findings to emerge from the coding process and cross-case analysis between students was the amount of personal motivation these students derived from their vantage point as the first in their families to attend college. One of the students expressed feeling honored to be a role model for her nieces and nephews. Another common motivator for these students was the awareness that earning a college degree gave them the opportunity to become more financially secure than their parents. SB (an athlete from California) seemed to wear her first-generation status as a badge of honor, saying:

*I’m the person to go to college out of my whole entire family—aunts, uncles, grandparents, parents, siblings—and I have two older sisters. So, they make me feel like I’m like a really good kid, you know? So that’s awesome! They just make me want to try hard cause I want to prove everyone wrong—that I can do it. I want to try hard now and graduate and have a good future.*

When asked if being the first in his family to attend college put him at a disadvantage compared to others, BH (a commuter who returned on academic probation) said: *“No, if anything it’s my boost to do better.”* However, DL (who couldn’t return because of an unpaid student account bill) articulated his perspective of one of the most significant and inherent challenges faced by first-generation college students—not having

any family members who could share advice about how to cope in the college environment. DL said: *“I had to wait until I got here and got, you know, ideas from different professors, my advisors, to find out what needed to be done to be successful.”*

## CONCLUSIONS

Tinto held that understanding trends for student persistence could be brought to light by examining the relationship between students' commitment to their academic goals (and to the institution) and how these were mediated by the efficacy of their interactions with the academic and social norms of their institution. In addition, retention literature has insisted that students who were the first in their families to enter college carried with them unique burdens that inherently created additional obstacles to goal attainment not faced by continuing generation college students. Further, the limited retention research based on first-generation students at private institutions, in particular, proposed that those students were more likely to have come from private high school settings, more likely to have earned a high grade point average in high school, and had greater family financial support than did first generation students who attended public institutions. The same research submitted that first-generation students at private universities were also more likely to be attracted to a smaller campus setting and persuaded by liberal financial aid packages.

Thus, examining these findings using the Tinto lens obliged the researcher to further filter the results by existing research for first-generation students in the private institutional setting. Basically, the findings of this research confirmed the efficacy of the Tinto Model (1993) for connecting the circumstances and experiences of college students to their capability to persist, based upon the efficacy of their academic and social integration accomplishments within their distinctive institutional environments. However, the findings also revealed possible inconsistencies with the current wisdom that

has informed the pervasive profile for the typical first-generation at risk student, and in particular, how these first-generation students interact within the norms of a private, faith-based, less selective university setting.

This section will present conclusions from the research results and recommendations for educational leadership and practice within the conceptual framework of the Tinto Student Departure Model (1993).

### **Motivation and Academic Integration**

Academic integration refers to the degree to which new students accept and incorporate academic norms of the college. Tinto (1993) suggested that academic integration was partially based on the intentions and expectations that new students brought with them to college. Student motivation or drive was an integral element to that process. In particular, this research showed that new student academic drive or *motivation* was reflected by the students' willingness and *commitment* to reaching their academic goals, based upon the *value* they placed on reaching their goals for academic success, and the *efficacy* they applied to their *academic decision-making* in order to promote attainment of those goals.

### **Conclusion 1**

The initial high academic expectations of these first-generation at risk students were not wholly sufficient for them to be academically successful during the first semester in college, based upon final grade point averages. The students who took part in this study reported beginning their respective college careers with very high academic expectations and lofty intentions and aspirations, but the results of their first semester

academic performances dramatically demonstrated that high expectations, by themselves, were not sufficient to achieve academic success, *in all cases*. At the conclusion of their first semester, five of the twelve students in the study were placed on academic probation. Many of these students were insufficiently prepared for the self-discipline and independent study required to be academically successful on the college level. For some, their initial overly optimistic expectations proved to be unrealistic.

### **Recommendation 1**

It would be helpful for institutions to integrate mandatory academic support programming, such as supplemental instruction, into all freshman-level courses, particularly for those that typically demonstrate high rates of failure or withdraw. The benefit to incorporating intentional academic assistance in this manner would be two-fold. First, it would help counterbalance the sometimes unrealistic expectations new students bring into college—that it won't require any more time and effort than high school—by relieving them of some of the burden to seek independent academic assistance, when needed. Second, it would offer students an early opportunity to value the role academic support can play in student success.

### **Conclusion 2**

It is critically important to first-year at-risk students that they maintain and sustain high levels of motivation in order to be academically successful in college. An important finding from this study was that all the students reported high levels of motivation at the start of the semester, but unfortunately, the academic motivation for several of the students became tempered by their individual experiences at school both inside and

outside the classroom. Their academic motivation was tested by several of the common types of frustrations faced by many typical college students including disillusionment with some of their college courses and professors as well as by social distractions. For several students this has a deleterious effect on their academic performance during the crucial first semester, thus landing them on the academic probation roles.

Interestingly, even though the students were all labeled as academically “at-risk”, *the students themselves did not feel that their academic problems were the result of an inability to do college-level coursework.* This observation was counter-intuitive to the current research on first-generation students, which suggests that first-generation students enter the university environment with lower self-esteem regarding their academic potential, as compared to their continuing-generation counterparts.

However, several of the students *were* unable to handle the personal responsibility that came with the sudden freedom they discovered at college. By the end of the first semester, the students who persisted in good academic standing had developed the necessary academic and social efficacy to understand what they needed to do inside and outside the classroom in order to meet the academic demands of college and how to make the appropriate academic and social decisions required to pass their courses. Several made deliberate choices to reprioritize their schedules to decrease the amount of time they spent engaged in social activities and to increase the amount of time they spent on their academic responsibilities. This finding emphasized the critical importance of motivation in successfully surviving the first year of college (Allen, 1992).

## **Recommendation 2**

Universities that require first-year at risk students to enroll in mandatory college orientation classes should continuously monitor the feedback and evaluation of these courses by the students to determine the effectiveness of these courses *from the viewpoint of the students*.

## **Motivation and Social Integration**

Social integration was viewed as the result of developing friendships with other students and faculty members. In Tinto's model, a student who did not achieve some level of academic or social integration was likely to leave school. Social integration was also considered by Tinto (1993) to be a key area in determining student persistence. The following conclusions for leadership, policy, and practice are categorized by Tinto's descriptors.

## **Conclusion 3**

Attendance at cultural, athletic and recreational events was not related to student persistence in this study. Several of the students attended some of the events during the first semester; however none of the students were comfortable with becoming involved in formal student organizations, such as academic clubs or student government. Ironically, the students with the highest academic performance were the less socially active students. Several of the students maintained that they did not want extracurricular activities to divert their time from their academic responsibilities. However, several of the same students who claimed to be under involved, socially, also reported that they routinely participated in faith-based formal and informal programming, not typically found at

secular colleges, such as small-group bible study, attendance at the student-led church services, and participation at weekly faith-based student-led worship activities. This finding was consistent with the Tinto interactionalist model of student departure (1993). The model included formal and informal extracurricular activities as one of the institutional experiences that impact student retention.

### **Spiritual Fit and Motivation**

The Tinto model also suggests that students who are socially integrated and feel that they “fit” it to the social life of the college tend to persist while students who do not feel that they belong departed. Many of the students in the study made reference to feeling like they “fit” in with the culture of the institution. In most cases, this sense of well-being was rooted in their congruence with the Christian mission of the university and the sense of community which emerged from sharing common values. Notably, 71% of the students who returned in good standing for the second semester had indicated that this university had been there “first choice,” typically citing the knowledge of the university’s Christian mission as an influential factor. This finding supported Tinto's (1993) contention that social congruence with the culture of the institution served as a mitigating facet to the development of students’ institutional commitment leading to persistence.

### **Recommendation 3**

Based on the findings in this study, Christian colleges and universities may want to focus more on students’ “spiritual fit” into the campus during the recruiting and admission process. Also, Christian colleges and universities may need to be more up



front in their recruiting efforts by emphasizing the spiritual nature of their campuses. This will have the effect of attracting students who are concerned about their spiritual development while on campus.

#### **Conclusion 4**

Despite the importance attached to faculty interaction by researchers, there was very little interaction outside of class between the at-risk students and faculty. The reward system of this college does not provide career incentives for faculty to engage students outside of the classroom. The school in this study is a teaching university, not a research institution and there is not the kind of faculty-student research mentorship that one would find on research campuses. Although the university uses a faculty model for academic advising, these interactions amount to basic class-scheduling. Otherwise, many of the faculty at this school arrive on campus, teach their classes, attend required meetings and then leave. Several of the students expressed an interest in forming a relationship with their professors outside of the classroom, but these relationships did not materialize. It is unrealistic to expect first-year students to be proactive or assertive in taking the first steps to establish these relationships. College professors often appear aloof and intimidating to first-year students; therefore, it is incumbent for faculty to reach out to new students to develop these positive linkages (Hernandez, 2000, Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

#### **Recommendation 4**

The university should consider designing and implementing organizational structures within the institution that will foster more faculty-student interactions outside

of class. Retention researchers have stressed the importance of out of classroom interactions with faculty as being important to student retention (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). These relationships seem to be especially important to retention of minority students (Endo & Harpel, 1982; Hsiao, 1992; Hurtado, 1994; Mayo, Murguia & Padilla, 1995).

There are numerous possibilities to foster interpersonal relationships with students outside of the classroom. For example, at the College there is currently an active Student Government Association (SGA) on campus that includes numerous academic and social clubs. The charter of each campus club or organization that belongs to the SGA requires a club advisor. Some of these advisors are current faculty members, but many are not and faculty members are not required to be club advisors. It would be an easy matter to institutionalize more faculty-student interaction at this school by allowing club advising to count as one of the community services required of all full-time faculty as part of their contractual requirements to the university.

### **Motivation and Peer Relationships**

#### **Conclusion 5**

Successful social transition to college for at risk students is impacted both positively and negatively by the type of friendships that individual students developed with other students on campus. By the end of the first semester several students reported that their academic performance was being affected by the choice of students that they developed friendships with on campus. Some students reported spending too much time socializing with other students instead of spending time on their academic

responsibilities. Most of the students who survived to the second semester emphasized the importance of developing campus friendships with the right type of student. They believed that one of the best ways to increase their academic performance at college was to develop friendships with motivated students. They reported that if they developed friendships with students who socialized a great deal that they would also tend to spend a lot of their time socializing with them, to the detriment of their school work; but, they reported that if they developed friendships with students who had a serious commitment to their academic responsibilities that they would also tend to take their academic responsibilities more seriously. The strong bonds forged by the sharing of common goals and interests between the student athletes in the study and their respective teammates emerged as a particularly salient demonstration of the significance of positive peer engagement to successful social integration.

Indeed, there is a great deal of research that confirms the importance of peer support to student persistence in college (Burks & Barrett, 2009; Christie & Dinham, 1991; Dennis, Phinney & Chuateco, 2005; Kuh, 2005). This seems to be similar to the behavioral patterns of the students who took part in this study. It appeared that when these students associated with other students who did not attend class or who did not focus on their academic responsibilities, they tended to spend less time on their academic responsibilities. It also appeared that when they socialized with more motivated students who took their academic responsibilities more seriously, than these students tended to take their academic responsibilities more seriously.

## **Recommendation 5**

Colleges interested in increasing the student retention of at risk students often establish a *Learning Community* on their campuses based on the Tinto prototype (2005) to foster and develop positive social relationships with other students. This university has made an effort to implement this type of programming within its limited space in the resident hall facilities. One thing the university should consider adding to its Learning Community program is to establish mandated group study periods on related academic themes (psychology, sociology, or accounting, as examples). Mandated attendance to develop study skills has been cited by Engle (2007) as being helpful in the development of effective study skills. Another idea to consider would be the addition of integrating peer tutors into these mandatory study periods to assist students in working collaboratively on class projects and to help them to study for exams. The involvement of faculty advisors would also create another bridge between faculty and students to form relationships outside of the classroom.

### **Stop-outs**

According to Tinto, "Less than 25 percent of all institutional departures, nationally, take the form of academic dismissal" (1995, p. 49). Most students left voluntarily, according to Tinto, because of a poor fit between the student and the institution. Arguably, the two students in this study who failed to persist left the university on an involuntary basis since they were prohibited from registering for classes due to an unpaid student account balance. In both cases, the students had expressed their intention and desire to return. This is not a surprising finding, since the College Board

(2003), reported that the total costs at public four-year institutions represented about 6% of income for students from families with the highest income, 19% for middle-income families, and 71% for low-income families. These discrepancies are only magnified when imputing these findings to the higher price tag attached to attendance at most private institutions. For low-income students attending higher-cost private institutions, these statistics are operationalized in the form of student “stop-outs” (Tinto, 2006) meaning they have to take breaks between semester in order to re-gain financial footing to continue on. Such was the case with the two students in this study who were unable to return to the second semester because of financial problems. This finding supported Tinto’s (1993) position on the influence of external demands, such as financial constraints, to influence goal commitment.

### **Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations**

In this particular study there was a major discrepancy between the initial lofty academic expectations of the at risk students at the beginning of college and their actual academic performances during the first year. Many of these students reported in their interviews high levels of motivation, willingness and commitment, but often did not display the strength of will necessary to follow through on their intentions in the classroom. According to their self-reports, the academic failures of these students during the first semester were based almost exclusively on their unwillingness to *independently* perform the required academic work in college, rather than their *inability* to perform the required academic work. However, these students reported great appreciation for the

opportunity to have structured out-of-class collaboration with other students to extend their engagement with the class material.

In several instances, individual students also reported that they were distracted from their academic goals by the sudden freedoms of college living. Several students reported that they spent too much of their time engaged in social activities both on and off campus to the detriment of their academic goals, especially during the crucial first semester of college. Interestingly, several of the students that survived to the second semester of classes had consciously and deliberately reduced their social activities in order to devote more time to their academic responsibilities, with the result that the course grades of these students increased noticeably between midterm and the end of the first semester.

The results of this study supported and strengthened several of the major research elements of the Tinto Model (1993) of student persistence as it applied to at risk students in the small private faith-based university in the Southeast that was the site for this study. The Tinto Model (1993) suggested that students who conformed to the academic norms of college tend to persist and those students who did not conform to these standards tend to leave. The students in this study who did not conform to the academic norms of the college performed poorly in their first semester and were placed on academic probation.

Although the students on academic probation were eligible to persist, their low grade point averages placed them in the precarious position of having to work exponentially harder during the second semester to “dig out of their academic hold,” At this university, failure to maintain good academic standing for two consecutive major

semesters results in a mandatory six-month academic suspension period. Academic suspension is particularly painful for students who have taken out student loans, since periods of non-enrollment exhausts the loan repayment “grace period,” leading to premature loan repayment responsibilities, prior to graduation.

The Tinto model also suggested that students who were socially integrated and felt that they “fit” it to the social life of the college tended to persist while students who do not feel that they belong departed. Many of the students in the study made reference to feeling like they “fit” in with the culture of the institution. In most cases, this sense of well-being was rooted in their congruence with the Christian mission of the university and the sense of community which emerged from sharing common values. This finding supported Tinto's (1993) contention that social congruence with the culture of the institution served as a mitigating facet to the development of students’ institutional commitment leading to persistence.

In several respects, this research challenged some of the common assumptions about first-generation at-risk students pertaining to their motivation, commitment, and self-image, and self-efficacy. Retention research has indicated that first-generation at risk students often feel inferior to their continuing-generation counterparts. For example, Riehl (1994) suggested that first-generation students had lower expectations in terms of grades and degree aspirations than did other students—which have been linked to lower grade expectations of first-generation students with their uncertainties about academic skills. However, from the student interviews in this study emerged the unanimous perception that these first-generation students believed they were at least as capable as

anyone else in their classes. In fact, some of the students were almost confident to a fault, as revealed by the optimistic comments made at midterm by several of the students who ended the semester on academic probation. Although they knew their midterm grades had confirmed they were struggling academically, they believed they would be able to turn the situation around and end the semester on a positive note.

Retention literature has tenaciously profiled first-generation students (compared to continuing generation students) as being more likely to receive the Pell Grant, more likely to have higher dollar amounts of unmet financial need, more likely to emerge from single-parent homes, have lower SAT scores, and more like to have minority ethnic status. These factors, thus, cause them to be less academically prepared, motivated, and successful. However, the students who finished the first semester in good academic standing were among the highest risk for attrition, based on family background and academic preparedness.

The study also provided strong support for the utility of the qualitative research as a useful perspective for the study of student persistence at college.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

#### **Recommendation 1**

This study focused exclusively on first-generation at risk students, but the student sample consisted of several minority students (8 of 12). In addition, all of the students who ended the semester on academic probation were minorities. Future qualitative research studies using the action research design (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) might be conducted to examine the specific problems of first-year, first-generation minority



students. It would be important to design an action research project that would include the voices not only of minority first-generation students, but also the university faculty and staff stakeholders in order to propose an operative course of action to help improve institutional academic support programming to these students.

### **Recommendation 2**

A one-semester time frame was used in this study based on the research findings that indicated that college attrition was most pronounced during the first year (Tinto, 1993). However, it would also be valuable to track a first-generation at risk cohort through the full four years to obtain a more complete picture of their eventual outcomes and the various academic and social issues that these students would face over their entire college careers. We may find some answers to important persistence questions that still remain unanswered. For example, how does the persistence rate of first-generation at risk students improve after the first year? What happens to their grade point averages in the long run? Are there academic late bloomers among the first-generation at risk population? How economically fragile are these students and how important are financial aid and student loans to their persistence? Also, how does the sense of community students often spoken about in the study mediate the rate of persistence among this sub-population at the university?

### **Recommendation 3**

This study was conducted at a small, private, less-selective university in the Southeast with a purposeful student sample of convenience. Since the results of this study could not be generalized to other colleges, it would be important for other schools

to replicate similar studies of first-generation at-risk students on their own campuses through the use of case study or action research methods based on actual student interviews to better understand the dynamics of student persistence that may be idiosyncratic to their institutional culture and to listen to the voices of the students to determine what they perceive to be the obstacles to college persistence on their campuses.

#### **Recommendation 4**

The qualitative research methodology is recommended for future studies of student attrition. The case study or action research model is especially well suited to the study of student persistence for two major reasons. First, and perhaps most importantly, it gives voice to those who are the real experts on why students leave college, the students themselves. During the literature review stage of this project it was at times exasperating to read research study after research study on student persistence by well meaning academic researchers who never really seemed to actually speak to any of the students themselves about their college experiences. Many research studies of student persistence were based on large samples of students who completed one-time questionnaires as well as the use of various forms of secondary data sources such as grade point averages and SAT scores.

#### **Final Thoughts**

In this particular research project, the students, in their own words, articulated to various lengths the individual adjustment problems they encountered during their first semester and how those experiences affected their sense of security and motivation to work harder and to seek needed assistance. While this researcher expected that these

students might cite the institution's limited institutional resources directed toward academic support services as a mediating influence on the outcome of their academic and social experiences; surprisingly, all of them inferred the perception that the institution was doing all it could to support their needs. Thus, qualitative research proved its worth as one of the best ways to determine the obstacles or barriers that pose the biggest challenges to students who struggle in college. It is important to *ask* the students and then to *listen* to what they have to say.

Indeed, Tinto (1993) maintained that each institution of higher learning contained its own unique culture and that what worked at one particular college may not necessarily be effective at another institution. It appeared that at this particular institution, while remediation was effective for helping some of these underprepared first semester students attain good academic standing, others students going through the same program landed on academic probation. While all of the students seemed highly motivated, many of them simply did not possess the academic preparation, language skills, or self-efficacy needed to be successful in college. Although it appeared that remediation efforts were generally successful with this particular student population, additional institutional research at the individual student level is needed to better determine the specific needs of these students.

For this researcher, the experience gleaned from this project witnessed the need for institutions that serve a significant population of at risk students to experiment with more intentional measures of connecting students to appropriate academic support, especially during the critical first semester of college. Supplemental instruction and peer

coaching are two types of integrative programming well-suited to this purpose, since they can be designed to integrate academic support into class instruction.

Perhaps the most significant outcome of this research project was its value in supporting Tinto's conjecture that the key to unlocking advanced understanding for the reasons behind why students' depart from college is to be found within the context of *qualitative research*. Early theories of student retention based on quantitative research have been useful to expose overarching trends and patterns to explain why some students do not persist until graduation; but, it appears these may only represent the proverbial "tip of the iceberg." Moving forward, it is likely that the remaining mass of knowledge to be learned about student retention will emerge from qualitative methods that are designed to examine the unique student-to-institution dynamics that influence student circumstances and motive decisions to persist or depart.

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## **APPENDICES**

## **APPENDIX A**

### **Participant Demographic Information**

Project: Perceptions of Academic and Social Integration of First-Generation College Students at a Less-Selective, Private, Faith-Based University

Thank you for consenting to participate in this study. The purpose of this survey is to gather some information about your status as a first-generation or continuing-generation college student. This information will be used in the qualitative analysis of your interview. It should take you about 5 minutes to complete the demographic questionnaire. Completion of this survey is voluntary, and all responses will be kept confidential. Please answer each item as honestly as possible.

**For each item below, circle the item that applies to you.**

1. Age:

- a. 20 or less
- b. 21-25
- c. 26-30
- d. 31-40
- e. 41-50
- f. 51+

2. How many years in college:

- a. 1 year or less
- b. 2 years
- c. 3 years
- d. 4 years

3. Please select the choice that most accurately indicates your ethnicity:

- a. African-American (Black, Caribbean)
- b. Asian/Pacific Islander
- c. Caucasian
- d. Hispanic (Latino, Chicano, Puerto Rican)
- e. Native American or American Indian
- f. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- g. I choose not to disclose

4. Where do you think you are ranked among your peers in your high school graduating class?
- a. Among the top 15%
  - b. Among the top 40%
  - c. Below the top 40%
5. What was your average grade in high school? (Circle only one.)
- a. A or A+
  - b. B+
  - c. B
  - d. B-
  - e. C+
  - f. C
  - g. C-
  - h. D+
6. What is the extent of your father's education?
- a. Some high school
  - b. High school graduate
  - c. Some college
  - d. Associate degree
  - e. Bachelor degree
  - f. Advanced degree (Masters, MBA, Ph.D., M.D., etc.)
  - g. Unknown
7. Please list your father's occupation (if unemployed, please indicate):
- 
8. What is the extent of your mother's education?
- a. Some high school
  - b. High school graduate
  - c. Some college
  - d. Associate degree
  - e. Bachelor "degree
  - f. Advanced degree (Masters, MBA, Ph.D., M.D., etc.)
  - g. Unknown

9. Please list your mother's occupation (if unemployed, please indicate):

\_\_\_\_\_

10. If requested, would you be interested in participating in a research project to share your academic and social integration experiences during your first semester at this University?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If not, what concerns do you have about participating in this project?

\_\_\_\_\_

11. If selected for this study, how may I contact you?

Cell phone: ( ) \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_

Home phone: ( ) \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Letter of Invitation to Participants**

#### **Invitation to Participate in an Important Research Study**

This letter is an invitation to participate in an educational research study conducted by Annie Watson from Clemson University Graduate School of Educational Leadership. Annie is interested to hear the educational stories of students who came from a family where neither parent graduated from college. Specifically of interest to this researcher is how the academic and social integration experiences of freshman, first-generation students influence their decision to persist into the next semester.

This study is being conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a doctoral degree and is under the supervision of Dr. Russell Marion.

#### **Why Participate?**

- Your views are unique and worthy of being told!
- You will have the opportunity to earn class points in your Freshman Seminar course for simply sharing your views about your academic and social integration experiences during your first semester in college.
- Your participation in this study will help educate others about how first-generation students make decisions about college and navigate college life.
- Your story could help generate change in the university that makes the college experience better for other students like you.

#### **What Would I Have To Do?**

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to talk with Annie for approximately 60 minutes at the location of your choice. The interview will be on these general topics:

- Your experiences leading up to your decision to go to college.
- Your experiences of being a first-generation student while in college.
- Your decision about continuing or discontinuing attendance in college.
- Your plans for the future.

**How Will Data Be Collected?**

If you decide to participate, you will be asked for a private, confidential, one-on-one interview that is audiotaped and then transcribed. In addition, with your permission, some background information will be collected from your student file at CSU to understand your academic background within the context of your interview. All of the information, including the research interview, will be kept confidential throughout the study and identified with a pseudonym (code name) only. If you agree to participate, Annie is the only person who will have access to your private information.

**Are There Any Risks?**

Participation in this study has the possibility of causing inconvenience and/or mild psychological discomfort. However, you may withdraw your participation in the study at any time and you are free to refuse to answer any of the interview questions asked of you without negative consequences.

**How Do I Sign Up and/or Learn More?**

You can reach Annie anytime in one of two ways:

- Phone: 803-863-7159
- On-line: [awatson@csuniv.edu](mailto:awatson@csuniv.edu)

Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to take part in the study, and it will not affect your Freshman Seminar grade or your relationship with any aspect of Charleston Southern University.

Thank You!



PhD Candidate, Clemson University



## **APPENDIX C**

### **Informed Consent**

Thank you for your interest in this research project! You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Annie Watson from Clemson University, Graduate School of Educational Leadership. This researcher hopes to learn more about the academic and social integration experiences of first-generation college students. The term *first-generation student* is defined as a student from a family where neither parent has completed a 4-year college-level degree.

This study is being conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a doctoral degree and is under the supervision of Dr. Russell Marion of Clemson University. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because neither of your parents has earned a four-year college degree and you are enrolled in a Freshman Seminar course as a first-semester college student at a small, private, less-selective, faith-based university.

#### **What Will I Have To Do?**

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to talk with the researcher for approximately 60 – 90 minutes. The interview will be on these general topics:

- Your experiences leading up to your decision to go to college.
- Your experiences of being a first-generation student while in college.
- Your decision about continuing or discontinuing attendance in college.
- Your plans for the future.

#### **How Will Data Be Collected?**

If you decide to participate, you will be asked for a private, one-on-one interview that is audiotaped and then transcribed by the researcher. After the interview has been transcribed, you will be given the transcribed interview and asked if there are any comments you provided that you would like to change, delete, or elaborate upon to reflect what you would really like to convey.

In addition, some background information may be collected from your student file, including your age, ethnicity, gender, number of credits taken per term, and grade

point average will be used to understand you in the context of your story. This information will be kept confidential throughout the study and identified with a pseudonym (code name) and project identification number only. Only the researcher will have access to what information belongs to you personally.

### **Are There Any Risks?**

Participation in this study has the possibility of causing inconvenience and/or mild psychological discomfort in the form of anxiety, stress, sadness and/or embarrassment when sharing your personal experiences. However, you may withdraw your participation in the study at any time and you are free to refuse to answer any of the interview questions asked of you without negative consequences. Furthermore, you will have an opportunity to review and revise your interview answers after the interview has been transcribed.

### **What Are The Benefits?**

If you decide to participate in this study you will be given an extra class points in your Freshman Seminar course for your time and thoughtful reflection during the interview. You will be given the points as soon as the interview is completed. In addition, the information gathered in this study has the potential to increase knowledge about first-generation college students and their decisions to continue or discontinue college attendance. This information could be used to support positive changes in the university which lead to better support for students.

### **How Will You Protect My Privacy?**

All of the information collected from you in this study will be kept confidential. Your name will only be used on the consent and personal contact information forms. These will be kept in a locked box in the researcher's office separate from all other data. Any other information collected from you (e.g. interview audiotapes, computer files, transcribed data) will be assigned a project identification code and/or pseudonym. When reporting data, any unique identifiers that could possibly reveal your identity will be changed or omitted to maintain your confidentiality.

**Any Questions?**

If you have concerns or problems about your participation in this study or your rights as a research participant, please contact Dr. Russell Marion at Clemson University, [rmarion2@clemson.edu](mailto:rmarion2@clemson.edu). If you have questions about the study itself contact Annie Watson at [awatson@csuniv.edu](mailto:awatson@csuniv.edu)

Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to take part in the study, and it will not affect your relationship with any parts of your university record. Your signature indicates that you have read and understand the above information and agree to take part in this study. Please understand that you may withdraw your consent at any time without penalty, and that, by signing, you are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies. The researcher will provide you with a copy of this form for your own records.

Signature

Date

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## **APPENDIX D**

### **Pre-Interview Reflective Questions**

Thank-you for your participation in this important study. Before our interview appointment, please take some time to reflect on the following questions to help prepare you for the interview. However, these are not the specific questions to be addressed in the interview:

1. What are some of the things that are going on in your life right now? 1a. How is that different from last year?
2. How did you make the decision about whether or not to go to college? What was that like? For instance: what kinds of things were you thinking about, what was going on in your life at that point, what kinds of things influenced you to do one thing or another?
3. Tell me a little about what it was like growing up for you and what your family thought about formal education.
4. What were your family's ideas about education in terms of their expectations for your life?
5. What about you, what was your attitude towards school?
6. Once you were in college, what was it like for you- what were some of the positive and not so positive aspects of that?
7. Some students from different backgrounds say that entering college is like entering a whole different way of life than what they were used to before college. Did you notice anything related to this idea when you started to attend college?
8. Did being from a first-generation background impact your experiences in college or at home in any particular way?
9. [Only non-returning students] Tell me about the whole process of not going back to college, when did you first start thinking about that?
10. Is there anything more you think the university could have done [be doing] to support your success in college?
11. What advice would you give to other first-generation students, like yourself, about going to college?

12. Suppose the next four years go the way you hope they will- that things work out pretty much the way you hope they will. What would that be like and where would you be two years from now?
13. If you were to give your educational life story a title, what would it be?

## **APPENDIX E**

### **Interview Protocol**

Project: Issues Affecting Academic and Social Integration of First-Semester First-Generation Students at a Less-Selective Faith-Based Private University

Time of interview: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_ Interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for consenting to participate in this study. I would like to record the interview so the study can be as accurate as possible. You may request that the tape recorder be turned off at any point of the interview.

The interview is structured with three sections of questions: (a) general (b) academic integration and (c) social integration.

#### **Section One: General Questions**

1. Why you did initially chose to come to this college? What factors went into your college choice? Was this college your first choice?
2. What characteristics of this institution initially appealed to you?
3. Have these perceptions about this institution changed over your first semester?
4. Can you identify anyone who has been a part of that process?
5. Did you come into the University with your major or career path selected?
6. What went into that decision? Was anyone else a part of that process?
7. Describe the biggest challenge you had to face at the University? How did you deal with it? Without disclosing anyone's name or specific position, was anyone a source of support/encouragement to you at that time?
8. Did you find that this institution had different norms/beliefs than you did? How did you learn about this aspect of the institution? Do you still see a difference between you and the institution in these areas? To what degree has that changed over your first semester?

9. Who has had the greatest level of impact/influence on you during your first semester at the University? Peers/faculty/staff/parents? Have these factors changed over your experience?
10. Without disclosing a specific name or person's position, can you identify one or two significant individuals from the institution impacted you for during your college experience? If yes, did you seek that person(s) out or did they approach you? How often did you meet? In what setting?
11. In what ways have you changed (intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually) over your first semester? How has that taken place? Who has been a part of that process?
12. Do you intend to drop out of college after this semester or transfer to a different school?
13. If you plan to persist, why did you ultimately decide to remain at the University? If you plan to drop out of college, how did you come to make that decision? If you plan to transfer after this semester, how did your experiences at the University affect this decision?

## **Section Two: Academic Integration**

1. How has the academic adjustment to college been so far?
2. How have your classes been going compared to how you thought they would be?
3. Have your academic goals changed so far?
4. Are you as confident of graduating college now as you were before classes started?
5. Discuss your motivation level at this point to succeed at college.
6. Describe how committed you are right now to continue to attend college.
7. How would you rank your academic ability right now compared to the other students in your classes?
8. What academic areas are you doing well in right now?
9. What academic concerns do you have at this time?

10. What kinds of academic assistance have been available to you this semester?  
How did you find out about them?
11. Have you used any of the University resources available to you? If so, did you seek them out? Did someone refer you to them?
12. If you did not use any of the University support resources-- why not?

### **Section Three: Social Integration**

1. Do you think that it has been a big social adjustment for you so far? Why or why not?
2. How do you think that you have been fitting in socially so far?
3. How did you find out about the social opportunities available to you as a student at this University?
4. Discuss your involvement, so far, in the various student organizations on campus?
5. Have you attended any of the recreational activities on campus? Which ones or why not?
6. Have you attended any of the athletic events on campus? Which ones or why not?
7. Have you attended any of the cultural events on campus? Which ones or why not?
8. Have you talked or interacted with any faculty members outside of class? What happened or why not?
9. Have you found it easy or difficult for you to form friendships on this campus with other students?



## APPENDIX F

### Memorandum of Permission



VICE PRESIDENT FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

April 17, 2013

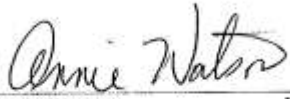
#### Memorandum of Permission

From: Dr. Jackie Fish, Vice-President of Academic Affairs  
Charleston Southern University

To: Dr. Marion Russell, et al. Clemson University  
Annie Watson, Dissertation Committee

Annie Watson, a PhD candidate at Clemson University has permission to conduct a limited scope qualitative study on the campus of Charleston Southern University. Annie has informed the University her proposed study examines the academic and social integration issues faced by first-generation freshman who choose to attend at small, private, faith-based, less-selective university.

Annie has agreed to refrain from using direct reference to Charleston Southern University or any of its students in any report pertaining to this study.

  
Annie Watson Date  
PhD. Candidate, Clemson University

 4-23-13  
Dr. Jackie Fish Date  
VPAA, Charleston Southern University

*Integrating Faith in Learning, Leading and Serving*

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PHONE (843) 863-7504 • FAX (843) 863-7533 • WWW.CHARLESTONSOUTHERN.EDU

# **APPENDIX G** **Institutional Review Board** **Exempt Review Application**

Exempt Review Application  
Clemson University (CU) Institutional Review Board (IRB) (Version 9.7.2012)  
[Clemson University IRB Website](#)

Office use only <input type="checkbox"/> Approved    Exemption Category _____  _____ Signature of IRB Chair / Designee	Protocol Number: _____  _____ Date
--	---

<b>1.</b>	<b>Developmental Approval:</b> If you already have developmental approval for this research study (you should know if you do), please give the IRB protocol number assigned to the study. More information available <a href="#">here</a> .
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<b>2.</b>	<b>Research Title:</b>  If different, title used on consent document(s)  If class project, include course number and title	Issues Affecting Academic and Social Integration of First-Generation College Students at a Less Selective Private University
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<b>3.</b>	<b>Principal Investigator (PI):</b> The PI must be a member of the Clemson faculty or staff. You cannot be the PI if this is your thesis or dissertation. The PI must have completed IRB-approved human research protections training. Training will be verified by IRB staff before approval is granted. Training instructions available <a href="#">here</a> . CITI training site available <a href="#">here</a> .		
	Name: Dr. Marion Russell	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Faculty <input type="checkbox"/> Staff	
	Department: Educational Leadership, College of HEHD	E-mail: marion2@clemson.edu	
	Campus address: Tillman Hall, Clemson University	Phone: 864-656-5105	
		Fax: _____	

<b>4.</b>	<b>Co-Investigator(s):</b> Co-Investigators must have completed IRB-approved human research protections training. Training will be verified by IRB staff before approval is granted. Training instructions available <a href="#">here</a> . CITI training site available <a href="#">here</a> .		
	Name: Ann Marie Watson	E-mail: awatson@csuniv.edu	
	Department: _____	Phone: 843-863-7159	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Faculty <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Graduate student <input type="checkbox"/> Other. Please specify. <input type="checkbox"/> Staff <input type="checkbox"/> Undergraduate student		
	Name: _____	E-mail: _____	
	Department: _____	Phone: _____	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Faculty <input type="checkbox"/> Graduate student <input type="checkbox"/> Other. Please specify. <input type="checkbox"/> Staff <input type="checkbox"/> Undergraduate student		

## APPENDIX H

### Initial and Continuing Commitment

	Initial Commitment	Initial Beliefs	Intent to Persist	Commitment to Persist	Motivation to Persist
<b>BG</b>	<p>"I'm a prefer walk-on for the football team; but, I am ineligible right now because of my grades from high school."</p> <p>"Just the area around here, and the weather and stuff. I knew a couple of people down here, too. I know people who come to school here. Yeah, one dude, James Smith that plays football. He went to the same high school as me. He was a big factor in my coming down here."</p>	<p>"The Christian ways. I mean I came from a Christian background, but like, I wasn't in church every Sunday. Here you got Chapel every Wednesday—I'm catching on to it. It hasn't changed at all. I mean at first I was kind of iffy about it when I was declared ineligible. But when I see my teammates they say "Yeah Drake, we want you to come back" and the coaches they say "We want you to come back; you contributed to the team." It just made me want to stay more.</p>	<p>"No; not at all. I just want to get back out there on the team. I can't go back to Greenville. I got in a lot of trouble in high school, so I know if I go back home, I'll get back in the same crowd. I know I don't want to let my momma and grandma down."</p> <p>"Even if I'm not actually playing sports right now they know I play football, so I know I fit in. I feel good about it."</p>	<p>"Committed; very committed."</p>	<p>"I'm very motivated every time I go out to practice and watch the boys practice, go to the weight room or be around the team it- motivates me more and more. Sometimes it's hard; but sometimes it's helpful; It's both. It hurts you cause you're not there, but it motivates you cause you see your boys and it makes you want to be out there more."</p> <p>"I mean I got a long way to go; I just started right now."</p>

	Initial Commitment	Initial Beliefs	Intent to Persist	Commitment to Persist	Motivation to Persist
BT	<p>“It actually was my first college choice. I heard a lot of good things about it and a lot of friends are here. The reason why I chose this place is because it helped me financially and a lot of people from church come to this school.”</p> <p>“The family environment—It’s like everybody is kin to each other. It didn’t matter what happened—we just melded well.”</p>	<p>From the people I’ve seen so far they have been very kind—especially the students. They don’t really discriminate or do something that would be against what I think. This sound weird to say but there are some students that want to party outside—that want to do stuff that I wouldn’t agree to. I didn’t know it was going to be like that. I didn’t know that for some reason. By the dorms, as I was walking from the Brewer Center—there was a pregnancy stick. I want to stay here; it’s just—it was shock value, I guess. Overall I was thinking that everything about the university was close to perfect, but I guess nothing can be.</p>	<p>“No; not really.”</p> <p>“I’m trying to find more stuff about it. I’m still trying to find myself socially.”</p>	<p>“One-I got to keep on going, and two—ultimately, there’s nothing but this. I could have more plans, but I don’t see anything as of yet that—this is the only thing going for me right now. College is the most important thing to me right now.”</p>	<p>“In the beginning, I was completely motivated. I had to do everything. I went to the writing center multiple times to get my papers fixed. Right now, I don’t have half the motivation. but I’m trying to put everything together. I’m still going to the writing center. It’s just— I don’t know when my drive left. —I’m still doing what I have to do. I still have the mindset, But my drive, overall, I want to do everything I can to finish college.</p> <p>“I don’t know. I am sure I will. I’m sure I will complete college. I am resolved to finish college but my confidence is shaky.”</p>

	Initial Commitment	Initial Beliefs	Intent to Persist	Commitment to Persist	Motivation to Persist
<b>RH</b>	<p>"It was not my first choice, but it was local and close to home— and my Dad wanted me to be close to home. And, I don't think I was ready to be gone."</p> <p>"I liked that it's a Christian environment, so there's nice people."</p>	<p>"It's basically the same thing that I've grown up on—church. What they teach here is basically the same thing I've been learning,—so not really a change."</p>	<p>"I do not."</p> <p>"No, not really. I kind of see how people are and what people got into here and it's uplifting, I guess. It's very encouraging here. I don't think I'd get that at another college."</p>	<p>"I am going to transfer my sophomore year, though. And I like being close to my family, so rooming with my sister—it would be so fun! We're like best friends."</p>	<p>"My motivation is my dad always told us— if you want to do this, I'll support you, pay for anything.' He's really pumping me up to be a trainer for a big team. So, it's really motivating."</p> <p>"I'm kind of lazy—I thought I was going to be really struggling, but I'm not. I think I'm doing good, and I'm still going to work on it."</p>
<b>BW</b>	<p>"Actually, this is the only place I applied to because I just went to high school right across the street at Northwood Academy."</p> <p>"I chose here because it was convenient." I liked that it was smaller and it was a Christian based school."</p>	<p>"I mean there are some people who don't have the same beliefs. I can see in Chapel they're moaning or on their phones and they are, like, "'when can this be over". You can tell some people just aren't into it. At least people know a general idea of what this school is trying to do with the Christian aspect of it."</p>	<p>"I'm not going to drop out; but, I was thinking about going to a different one— But, I don't think I will. I have fun and it's close to home."</p> <p>"I was expecting it to be way smaller; but I like that it's a little bigger-you don't know everybody on campus— you're constantly meeting new people."</p>	<p>"I would say I'm really committed. I know I need to do this to get ahead—do what my parent's didn't."</p>	<p>"I see how my parents didn't go and they've always regretted it. I definitely want to stay in it."</p> <p>"I know I definitely want to graduate from college, so I'm not going to drop out. I know I would regret it later on if I did."</p>

	Initial Commitment	Initial Beliefs	Intent to Persist	Commitment to Persist	Motivation to Persist
JM	<p>“I wanted to go to Clemson, but at the same time I wanted to stay local—and it was close to home.”</p> <p>“I like the fact that it’s a Christian university and it has good athletics. The good thing about college is it rules out people who want to succeed and those who don’t. I think it’s a beautiful campus and it’s close to home.”</p>	<p>“I’ve been in Christian schools my whole life; I figure it would be. I was surprised—the truth, the realness of it. Everybody is supportive. I didn’t really think it was going to be as—close. I met a lot of good people. I didn’t expect all that. I still believe it’s a Christian campus and all its values are true.”</p>	<p>“I’ve had friends ask me to transfer, but I’d never think about dropping out. I’d rather live on campus. I’d be able to be more involved with the activities because I would not have to drive back and forth.”</p> <p>“I have a lot of friends wanting me to go to C of C but I’d rather not go there. It’s too many bad influences in downtown Charleston.</p>	<p>“Oh, very committed. I’m going to stick to it until either World War II or the Rapture. I don’t have to pay for any of this—my grandma helps to pay. So it will pay off in the end. And being successful—I want to make something of myself and make an impact on the world. Do something that people will forever know.</p>	<p>“Well, I’m motive to get motivated. I know I need to get with it and start doing better—I just feel I am so far in this rut of bad grades—just being like blindsided by the difficulty of college compared to what I’m used to.”</p> <p>“I have never doubted my abilities to succeed so—not really at all.”</p>

	Initial Commitment	Initial Beliefs	Intent to Persist	Commitment to Persist	Motivation to Persist
NS	<p>“I initially decided to come here because I am on a soccer scholarship. I chose Charleston because it is close to where I live. Charleston is just a great city. I like having that religious background just to keep me on track”</p> <p>“I loved my coach—he really is the reason that I came here and just the religious aspect of the whole thing.”</p>	<p>“Overall, I have the same beliefs. I’m Catholic and this school is Baptist. The first day I went to Chapel it was overwhelming. I wasn’t expecting it at all. Sometimes I feel different. If I came in here not having a basic Christian belief system I think I would be really lost. Faith is integrated in all of it. If you’re just doing something for yourself, then you might not—but if you are doing something for the greater good and for God—it just pushes you to do more.”</p>	<p>“No, definitely not.” “I think I have been doing well—I have all As and Bs right now. I came in thinking college is 100 times different than high school. Instead of me slacking off, it’s made me gain more responsibility”.</p> <p>“Obviously, for soccer; but I think I fit in really well here-like with the education and the spiritual aspect. I think it just fits.”</p>	<p>“I’m planning on staying here until I get a degree in whatever I want to do.”</p>	<p>“I really want to succeed at college. My dad’s one of the reasons. He works in construction and he miserable. He doesn’t make enough money, and that keeps me motivated. My Mom is struggling because she’s not getting money from him. So that’s motivating me to want to be successful and not have to depend on someone else to support me anymore.”</p> <p>“There’s never been a doubt that I would finish college; that has not changed for me, so far—even though it has been tough.”</p>

	Initial Commitment	Initial Beliefs	Intent to Persist	Commitment to Persist	Motivation to Persist
LC	<p>"This college was only one of my choices. One thing that got me here was the city of Charleston. My mother was attracted to the Christian environment and fell in love with the campus. What helped me to decide was the small classes and different things you can rely on to help keep your grades up and keep you involved— and I liked the Christian worldview."</p> <p>"I never wanted to go to a big school but I didn't want to go to a small technical school, so the size of it was ideal."</p>	<p>"I think I fit in pretty well. They don't ask for much, like the rules and regulation here are kind of what your parents would expect of you. It helps me be a better person. So I think I fit in with it. And the Christian beliefs? Sometimes I feel it's genuine—it feels a little phony sometimes. With some students it feels phony. You'll have a student up on the stage at Chapel preaching and singing and stuff and then you see that same person around campus and you smile and they look the other way or roll their eyes. As a Christian you're supposed to love everybody."</p>	<p>"I haven't considered leaving—No ma'am."</p> <p>"Nothing really changed; If anything, it's gotten better. I've learned about more things here that I wasn't aware about at first. The main reason I haven't considered leaving is I've seen other people drop out. Mostly, they go to a bigger school cause they weren't doing so well. Here, they know you by name and check up on you and give you all these resources. At a bigger school you're just like a number."</p>	<p>"I'd say I'm 100% committed. I don't want to be anywhere else but gaining a degree."</p>	<p>"I feel like I know where I'm going. I'm going to succeed at college."</p> <p>"I am now. In the past two weeks I have been because my mindset has changed. At first I wouldn't say I wasn't confident, like I said I wasn't looking at it from the big point of view, but now I'm confident because I just feel like I want to do much better."</p>



	Initial Commitment	Initial Beliefs	Intent to Persist	Commitment to Persist	Motivation to Persist
<b>DL</b>	<p>"I received a call from the school about a scholarship and it fit me best. I knew people that went here. Being that I'm a Christian, I felt this school would be the best to fit me—It being a Christian school and integrating faith and just the people here."</p> <p>"You feel accepted by everyone and feel welcomed."</p>	<p>"I feel like being at a Christian university just allows you to have that connection with God and also use Him to be successful in life."</p>	<p>"No; not at all. I plan on spending my whole four years here. I love it here."</p> <p>"After the first couple of days, and as far as academically, I feel pretty good. I feel like the professors and staff really helped me out. Everything's been going pretty good, as far as my perception of this school."</p>	<p>I plan on spending my whole four years here. I love it here. It really fits me."</p> <p>"When I start something I like to finish it. Transferring to a different school is not the best choice knowing that I'll get used to it— the professors and how this college does things. This would be a good place to stay. I have a good opportunity here."</p>	<p>"My motivation is very high right now. Being around positive influences, staying on top of my game—classes, school work, and extracurricular activities."</p> <p>"Yes I am—knowing that I have all these teachers that would do anything that it takes for me to succeed. I feel like it's very possible for me. I really see it coming."</p>

	Initial Commitment	Initial Beliefs	Intent to Persist	Commitment to Persist	Motivation to Persist
NL	<p>“It was not my first choice. I’m from Germany. I heard about the possibility that it’s quite easy to get a scholarship here in America for tennis players if you’re good enough.”</p> <p>“I know that it’s a Christian university but that’s not the real factor that influenced me. I knew that it is quite beautiful here; it’s a private university. Then I already talked to the coach and he was really nice. And I know someone who is also German so I had someone I could talk to when I had problems.”</p>	<p>“It’s different because it’s a Christian university and it’s more the Christianity than any school at home. People are more friendly. They’re more likely to help me if I have problems because of their faith. It just feels like a big community here.”</p>	<p>“No; I want to stay here.” I like it here so far. I’m getting used to it—even though it is different.”</p> <p>“I mean it’s still quite what I expected.”</p>	<p>“Basically, the same—absolutely very committed.”</p>	<p>“It’s very high. I know that I earned this athletic scholarship. I am just thankful that I got this opportunity, so I really want to graduate and use this opportunity. I have both academic and athletic scholarships.</p>

	Initial Commitment	Initial Beliefs	Intent to Persist	Commitment to Persist	Motivation to Persist
RG	<p>“Well, honestly, this wasn’t my first choice. My sister goes to the College of Charleston and that was my first choice; but, we had to get some military form signed. I was a little late by the time that we got the forms in. I only applied to these two.” “I like the idea of Chapel because it seemed cool and that’s what made it different to me.</p>	<p>“I knew it would be a Christian university but I thought professors wouldn’t really be saying anything about it—wouldn’t integrate it with their lesson. But they did, and so that was nice. I like it. At first, I honestly thought when I came here I was going transfer to College of Charleston; but, I ‘m starting to like it even more so I think I’ll stay.</p>	<p>“No ma’am,” “I just like the morals of this school. I can’t really explain it; there’s just something different about it—you’ll see people here and they’ll smile at you.”          “It’s the little things. People seem concerned about you, honestly. In high school the teachers would tell us that college professors wouldn’t care. They are just there to do their jobs. I’ve seen professors honestly show care, and they care for me.”</p>	<p>“I am very committed. Like—that’s all I want to do. Just make my parents proud; make a better life for me.”</p>	<p>“I’m very motivated. After seeing my sister—she struggled too; but she worked past it and that motivates me to just push harder and just do better.”           “I’m actually more motivated now since I’ve been struggling. It just motivates me even more.”</p>

	Initial Commitment	Initial Beliefs	Intent to Persist	Commitment to Persist	Motivation to Persist
<b>SB</b>	<p>“No; it wasn’t my first choice. I got offers from different schools because I’m a softball player. I like the school a lot because it’s a smaller school. I grew up in a really religious home and I was a strong Christian. I like how we have to go to Chapel and how there’s a church on campus. And then, I got offered a full ride to come here. I also liked the girls on the softball team and the coach.”</p> <p>“This is a D1 school and that it’s religious. I already know a lot of the athletes here, so that’s awesome.”</p>	<p>“I pretty much have the same beliefs. I like that there’s no drinking and it’s tobacco free.”</p>	<p>“No; it’s still the same. I really like it. I thought it would be harder making friends. But since it’s so small. I’ve made so much friends faster than I thought I was going to.”</p> <p>“No ma’am.” “Softball probably, and then I really like how it’s a Christian school. Again, it’s the two main reasons. And then I have my softball girls with me and we’re all really close and that’s good.”</p>	<p>“Yeah. I’m really committed. I mean that’s like my main focus right now.”</p>	<p>“I’m actually way up there because I just have family things going on—so I want to graduate. My devotion is just way up there. My little brother is 16 and he’s getting into a lot of trouble right now. I want to be a good role model for him and please my family. I have 5 nieces and nephews and they all look up to me. They’re all like ‘Where are you at? I want to see you.’ And I’m like ‘I’m in college.’”</p> <p>“I still think I’m going to graduate; so yeah, I’m pretty confident.”</p>

	Initial Commitment	Initial Beliefs	Intent to Persist	Commitment to Persist	Motivation to Persist
<b>BH</b>	<p>“This was my second choice— a family friend of mine went here for her master’s program. She said that this school doesn’t play any games; it’s legit. This school was very serious about getting your education.”</p> <p>“The school’s strong faith. I was on the campus one day and I was like—they actually have to go to church every other Wednesday, and I was like “Oh that sounds nice. I like that.”</p>	<p>“As far as my thoughts on the university, my belief hasn’t changed. I had the same views as the university coming into it and that hasn’t changed.”</p>	<p>“So far that I been here there’s really no big partying going on, so I would say, no I haven’t changed; it was exactly what I thought it would be.” “No; because I have good friends here. I talk to my Mom about the fact that we have to go to church every other Wednesday. She said ‘Oh that’s nice; it’ll keep you grounded, keeps you humble””</p>	<p>“I’m very committed. I know I have to do this for my family and for me.”</p>	<p>“My motivation level at first felt like a 5 and now it’s a full-on 10. Mom always says she doesn’t want me to settle for what I have now—she wants me to do better.”</p> <p>“I have to keep that level of confidence. If I feel like I’m sliding off and I don’t want to feel like I’m sliding off, I try to remain confident. I want to remain on the same track and get my work done.”</p>

## APPENDIX I

### Academic Adjustment

	Overall Adjustment	Current Academics	Academic Strength	Academic Concern	Academic Ability
<b>BG</b>	It's been tough cause like I said— no books. It's tough. I've just been doing what I can. I use my roommate's books sometimes.	The classes, I thought I was doing bad in I'm doing bad in—New Testament and World Civ, a lot of reading in those classes and I don't have textbooks.	I'm doing good in GNED class. That's the easiest one. I'm doing pretty good in English and Math.	That would be New Testament and World Civ—a lot of reading in those classes.	It isn't as high as it can be because I don't have the necessary tools and stuff— but I am making the best of it. I don't complain about it. I just get it done.
<b>BT</b>	I see that I have to take a step up. I'm still trying to get used to everything. Thanks to everybody, it's going smoother than I thought. I thought it was going to be a cliff; but really, it's kind of like steps.	I thought it was going to be just tests or that we wouldn't go over things if someone was confused. I would hear nightmares, like scary things, about some teachers.	Surprisingly, speech. I'm doing well in English, better than I thought I was going to be.	One of my concerns is that I might miss something since everything is all based on a schedule. I have to mentally put that schedule in my head or write it down on a journal. I'm scared that I might miss something in that schedule or something little in each paper.	Depending on the class, I would rank myself as a 3 or 4— 3.5 ( <i>out of 5</i> ). I am doing better than average. I am doing a little bit better than some of the other students, I think. I see other students looking at the phone or just stop paying attention. I think I'm more focused.
<b>RH</b>	It's been tough, a little. I really haven't been studying like I should.	Honestly, in high school I thought I would be clueless in college. I know the information, I'm not putting forth.	I enjoy Public Speaking— like, writing out my speeches.	I didn't know I was doing so bad in English; but I guess I am. English and math— that's all.	I don't really like to ask people about how they're doing, but some kids will walk up to me and tell me how they are struggling, too. I'd guess we're even, but I just have to study.

	Overall Adjustment	Current Academics	Academic Strength	Academic Concern	Academic Ability
<b>BW</b>		I thought I would be doing a little better in my classes. It's kind of hard. I'm doing ok. They're definitely two or three classes where I need to step it up.	English is my best class right now, I think. Well, maybe not. I don't know. All my classes are pretty average, all of them together—except for World Civ—I'm doing bad in that.	World Civ and math. Yeah. Math is definitely a struggle for me.	I feel like I definitely have to study more. I feel like other people are just naturally smart. My friends— they'll sit down and study for an hour and they'll get a good grade. I'll study for an hour and get a C.
<b>JM</b>	Oh! It was a shock— definitely. I kind of slipped away in high school and I thought I could slip away with this, but that didn't work. I kind of got myself into a deep hole right now. I don't even want to look at my grades.	Well, writing is very difficult. I have never been good at English. I mean I almost went into the English Bridge Program —maybe what I need. I hate that I can't comprehend well. That's one of the big things. My focus is just off. I know I have attention deficit disorder—it makes it harder cause there is so much more being required of me.	I don't feel like any—but math is pretty easy to learn. I just have to practice. I'm good at math, for me, it's just the practicing.	A lot— particularly writing. It just takes an extra long time for me—that's all. Writing essays forces me to think critically and use my mind. It just takes longer cause I have a hard time focusing.	In some ways. I think everybody has some kind of handicap; but if they apply themselves— they can have great potential. Also, I see a lot of other kids not struggling with writing and math as much as me, but math —I just need to study more. I hear about people studying for hours and hours and I barely study so— I think if I study, I'd be an extraordinary student.

	Overall Adjustment	Current Academics	Academic Strength	Academic Concern	Academic Ability
NS	It's been hard. When I was in high school, I had my Mom to push me to do stuff . So it's been hard because in high school I didn't have to do anything-studying.	I like my classes. I am doing a lot better than I thought I would. In high school I thought I wasn't a math person because I would be awful at math, but now I am doing really well. It just shows that if you put time into it you can really do it. Like history, I hated history—but now that's like my highest grade right now. SI has definitely	Everything—Math and English and history. Not a big fan of Music Appreciation. New Testament—I am doing good in, which I like since, I have never taken anything on Religion, so I think it's really cool.	I'm just concerned with what I am going to do. I don't know what I am going to major in and like I really wanted to declare my major after this semester; but I just don't know what I want to do. Like it's just a huge range. But overall, I feel pretty confident about my academic ability.	I think it's pretty high up there. Some people won't put in the effort—like my roommate She's smart, but she doesn't go to class and she doesn't study. I'm not smarter than her, we're the same; but because I am putting the effort in and she's not, that's what it comes down to, I think. If you want to succeed, then you will.



	Overall Adjustment	Current Academics	Academic Strength	Academic Concern	Academic Ability
LC	At first, it was tough, but I think that now things are more in place. I've got a laptop and I kind of understand what I need to do to pass a course. My first semester has been trial and error at its fullest effect. Now I feel like I can do a lot better, especially after I've been coming to the Student Success Center. Prof Brown's gonna connect me with someone that will stay on me on a regular basis. I know that is going to help because most of my friends are freshman and we don't have good study habits. I think having a peer that does study and I connect with him often—that will help.	Bad. Some stuff I just wasn't able to keep up with and some stuff I was just slacking. I think, mainly, I was slacking. Like, I would study but I would miss some classes because of a work schedule. I never really missed classes because I just played. I can say that my high school teachers were good in preparing me for college—	My Phonetics class, I'm doing fine in that class. My English class, I'm doing ok in that class. My math class—I'm not doing good in. My history class I'm not doing good in.	Math. I have a really good professor. She doesn't baby you or anything; but I think she's a really, really good professor when it comes to teaching and making you understand the material and making you understand that she is there for you— I feel like the class goes really, really fast and some stuff they expect you to know everything already. I thought I was prepared but I feel like stuff needs to be gone over before they just slap it on the board without reviewing things. But it's not like that.	Raw ability— I'd say we're all balanced. I wouldn't say I was doing as good as everybody else, but my ability is good as everybody else. I think we're all of the same level—same potential.

	Overall Adjustment	Current Academics	Academic Strength	Academic Concern	Academic Ability
DL	It's been going pretty good. I have a whole calendar of what I need to do, when is it due, and stuff like that to help me in classes.	Actually I thought my classes were going to be a little tough because it's a lot different from high school. But, if you just manage your time, pay attention in class, do your work when it's supposed to be done, you'll pretty much be successful. The difference between high school and college is you don't have the teacher to tell you to "turn this in" or, "it's going to be late". In college, you basically have to be responsible. It's not like high school where you can turn in work anytime you want it late. Here, you got to be on top of your game.	I would have to say as far as reading and writing, actually those have been my main strengths. In high school, I struggled with it at times. Now that I have these professors here helping me become a better reader and writer, it's actually been beneficial to me. Now it's become one of my strengths.	I would have to say having a lot to do at one time.	I don't know how people really do different things, but I feel like I'm up there, as far as how I want to be successful and how I want my grades to be. I feel like some people have the same mindset as me. I feel that some people want to be successful, to have those straight As and Bs, you know. But some people just want to get by, you know? And I'm not the type of person. I want to get by and achieve more than what's expected of me.

	Overall Adjustment	Current Academics	Academic Strength	Academic Concern	Academic Ability
NL	So far, I am doing good. I have most As on the tests.	They're better than I thought, actually. The first days I was very stressed out because I tried to write down everything what the professor was taking about. Now, I just realized all the PowerPoint presentations are online, so I don't have to write it all down. I can just listen and write it down. It's much easier now after I realize.	I am good in GNED, Kinesiology, and Music Appreciation; even though I don't really like it. But it's pretty easy.	Right now I'm lucky that in Psychology I don't have to write this 10 page paper because our professor changed two times. But if we would have to do it I would be really concerned about having to writing really long papers. In English class we just learn again the basics but most of the basics learned in Germany so it's easy for me. And I think it's easier for me to write in English than actually to talk because I have more time to think about the words I use. I like writing in English more than speaking.	Ok, I am in the Bridge Program, I have to mention it, but in my English class I am the best, even though it's not my first language. I think I am more ambitious than the others. I really do all the exercises, studying, and some of them are just a little bit lazy. And in the other classes, I know there are people who don't attend classes or just come in late 15 minutes all the time and I just try to be on time to do my stuff. I think I am over average in most of the classes.
RG	It's been tough, a little. Yeah. I really haven't been studying like I should.	In high school I thought I would be clueless in college. I'm not putting forth. I'm not using knowledge like studying. I'm not being smart about it.	I enjoy Public Speaking—like, writing out my speeches and I guess.	English. I didn't know I was doing so bad in English; but I guess I am. English and math—that's all.	I don't really like to ask people about how they're doing, but some kids will walk up to me and tell me how they are struggling, too. I'd guess we're even, I just have to study.

	Overall Adjustment	Current Academics	Academic Strength	Academic Concern	Academic Ability
<b>SB</b>	It's been really stressful. In World Civ we don't ever turn anything in— it's all on tests. Same for art apprec—that's so hard. I've never really had to study- school came easy to me. I'll tell my mom how hard it is and she's like "You'll be fine, keep praying." My mom can't relate how hard it is. I have no other family members that have been to college to tell her anything.	They're way more relaxed— well I mean they're stressful because there's so much information to take in. In high school it's "Can I go to the bathroom?" But in college you just get up and go. If you don't want to be there you just leave. If you don't feel good, you just leave.	I think I am doing pretty good in English. I don't have a math this year but I think I'm going to pretty well. I like American Government. Professor Gramling—she goes over it and has fun with it. I'm think I'm actually doing well in it just because of the way she teaches it.	Just with testing. At first I thought "Ok, I know this." Then I was like "you need to start studying." Then I got to a point where I was writing too much down on tests and I'm like, "ok now you just over studied." I am still trying to figure out what I have to do with this whole testing situation.	I think I am average. I don't want to say that I am smarter than all of them, but I know that I am not less smart. I would say that I fit in with them. So I feel like we are all on the same page as each other and we're all like overwhelmed, so we can all talk about it and study together.
<b>BH</b>	At the beginning it was kind of hard cause some of the grading system I'm not yet comfortable with. But now, I feel like I'm getting there, since it's getting towards the end of the semester.	When I first got here, I thought it was going to be easy breezy like high school, but here it's a whole other ball game. You have a choice to turn in something or not turn in. If you miss a day you will be alerted about it. It's upon yourself to get your work done instead of a teacher saying, "Oh, you missed it."	I'd say GNED, my math class, and my writing class. She says I'm doing good. The only one I'm worried about is music appreciation.	Music appreciation.	I never want to say that I feel like I'm ahead of people, but when it comes to math that's my subject. As far as English, she says I'm creative but it's hard to try to stay on one topic. In some classes I feel positive about it. I feel like I am doing better than some other students.

## APPENDIX J

### Intuitional Support-Mentoring

	Influenced Perceptions of University	Influenced Decision for Major	Faculty/Staff/Peers/Parents	Greatest Influence
BG	Football that's the only...football—that's about it.	Oh, no ma'am-don't have a clue. I really haven't given it too much thought.	Coach W, the DB coach; the Defensive Back coach. He comes to talk to me all the time to make sure I stay out of trouble and stuff like that. I see them around and they make sure my grades are straight and make sure I stay on top of everything.	This man named Jimmy from Greenville. He just gives me advice and stuff. I use to work with him back at home and he travels this area a lot. He was the big reason I came, too. He told me about the area and stuff. And then he brought me down here for the spring game. He's, basically, family. Yeah, but he does a lot for me. I appreciate him.

	Influenced Perceptions of University	Influenced Decision for Major	Faculty/Staff/Peers/Parents	Greatest Influence
BT	<p>The big ones would be the staff, the teachers, even people that aren't really my teachers or my professors. Even though I am not in their class at all, they still try to help me about the college itself, but also in the lessons that I can't really catch yet.</p>	<p>When I began, I wanted to do Biology; but the moment the website turned to that page I panicked at the last second. I'm not used to deciding for myself and a little bit of fear because this is a changing point and I don't know where I'm supposed to go.</p> <p>I looked at some majors on the website, but I can't decide just yet. I'm supposed to be doing that this semester in Professor B's class</p>	<p>Most of the time I had to seek them out. Other than the people said before, people from the Writing Center would be Sarah and Jason. The Library staff—they were very helpful. And there's a lot more than I probably can think of—but those are people that went through my mind.</p>	<p>Yeah, that would be my church. They reinforced me trying to do some extracurricular stuff. I don't really want to do any. Inside the campus it would be the faculty, itself. Dr. JB—she's been helpful. And Dr. PB—even though I was only part of the honors program for not even the whole semester—not even half the semester. He assured me that even though I left the program that there was no fear of doing it. My parents—I don't know if they really understand college. They just they see it as school. They know I have to get to school. They know that if I say something is for school that everything else dropped and they support me. They can't help me with my school work and trying to understand what I am going through.</p> <p>From the time I started, I thought I was alone. I thought nobody could help me, but as I kept going on, I have found out that there are a lot of people that are willing to help me—faculty, staff, and the Writing Center—basically a lot of people that help me improve my confidence and can see what they can help me do better.</p>

	Influenced Perceptions of University	Influenced Decision for Major	Faculty/Staff/Peers/Parents	Greatest Influence
<b>RH</b>	Tracy, she's like a young life leader that I met over the summer and she goes here. She kind of got me involved with Elevate (campus Christian organization) and stuff.	<p>I did; it's Sports Med.</p> <p>At Wando, where I went to high school, I was an athletic trainer for two years and the trainers were—they brought us here for clinics, so I already knew the athletic team—the whole trainer team. They wanted me. They were like, “oh, you'd be good here”. They just influenced me to go here. I was like “ok”.</p>	<p>These two girls down the hallway that since me and my roommates didn't get along and I met these two girls, and their so sweet—Audrey and Jess. They've helped me through the roommate drama and they told me, basically, “stay here” because I was going to transfer. They told me “you're going to meet new people.” They introduced me to other people; so, it's good. I have two of them and I am still in the same room. It's awkward. It's difficult. I'm just in there, with my headphones on. I leave and go to Audrey and Jess's room. I almost live in there.</p>	<p>My dad, because he wanted me to still be involved in going about my faith through college. He kept telling me if I went to another university other than CSU, I wouldn't have that consistency; and, so I went along with his words. He's been a big part of that.</p>

	Influenced Perceptions of University	Influenced Decision for Major	Faculty/Staff/Peers/Parents	Greatest Influence
<b>BW</b>	Probably my sister—she definitely told me everything about the school.	<p>I'm still undecided.</p> <p>Not a clue. My parents have been trying to help me, but I'm still not sure.</p>	I don't know I feel like I haven't really talked to any teachers really— just general classes and stuff. I haven't really talked on a deep level with teachers or anything. I haven't really connected with any faculty or staff—I guess I really should.	It's probably my friends. I have, like, three friends who, they keep me accountable for doing all my homework, going to all my classes— so probably them.
<b>JM</b>	Mainly my grandma—she's been very supportive. She's pretty much paid for a lot of my schooling my whole life. She's enabled me to be able to go to private Christian schools since 6th grade when they realized that I was doing pretty bad in public schools. And she's encouraged me to go to the best schools— paying it and supporting me. And my dad, at the same time, he's told me that...he always told me to be the best at everything I do or try to be the best.	<p>Well, I have so many choices I could do, it's just going to take— don't think I've matured enough to really decide, but I've thought about it. The other day I was almost 95% committed to being an orthodontist. So, that's probably what I am leaning toward. So like Biology.</p> <p>Well, I've always told my parents that I was going to make money and take care of them when I was older and have a big house. I told my grandma I was going to buy a castle and she could have her own wing of it. So like, that's what I want to do—I want to make the most of my life and succeed. I really do.</p>	Yeah—the Director over there at the Brewer Center—he's been helpful to me.	Well, all my friends will do study groups together—like Bihn and Hunter. A lot of students here since I've been staying here and I've been getting involved with the sports and stuff. So I guess it that my peers have had a lot of impact. And my Grandma—she always helps me get supplies. She's always there for me.



	Influenced Perceptions of University	Influenced Decision for Major	Faculty/Staff/Peers/Parents	Greatest Influence
NS	<p>Ok, well, definitely my soccer team. It's made it a lot easier — because we had to come in August 4, so we had a whole 2 – 3 weeks more than the other kids on campus. So, my soccer my soccer team has really helped and I've made a lot of really good friends here. And definitely my coaches and everyone, really, that's involved with the soccer team. We have assistant coaches and they really helps because not only do they help with soccer, they just keep you on the right track they watch out for you and act like your parents away from home.</p>	<p>No, I've like changed—I had this whole idea I was going to come here and go into business and open my own business. Then I wanted to do Kinesiology and now— I want to be a vet. It's all changing. I am just going to wait until next year, I think, to decide what I want to be.</p> <p>Describe the biggest challenge you've have had to face at the University? How did you deal with it? Was anyone a source of support/encouragement to you at that time?</p>	<p>Definitely my coach, Christy. She's our assistant coach. She went here and she played soccer here and I know that she just has really helped me through this whole thing because the first 3 weeks I was here I was calling my Mom and begging her to pick me up. And, I was just so depressed and I hated it. I live just two hours away and my Mom was here almost every weekend. But I was so depressed and I just hated it because I felt alone. I came here with my best friend but she's a lot more social than I am. She was making friends and she knew people before and I did—so I was so lost. But I talked to Christy about everything and she was able to, like, make me stick it out, basically. So she definitely was a really big help and she still is. Like, she is just motivational.</p>	<p>It's definitely, been one of our captains. Actually, we don't really get along that well. She is really smart and she's religious and she is just an all-around good person and just looking at her she makes me want to do better. Because, like, even though during games and practice she is yelling at me— it just makes me want to do better in school and everything she does. It's weird. Kind of like a role model.</p>

	Influenced Perceptions of University	Influenced Decision for Major	Faculty/Staff/Peers/Parents	Greatest Influence
LC	Definitely Professor B—especially lately. DW, the coordinator of the Brewer Center. The pastor at the Sunday services here, JD—he’s been helpful.	I did, but it has changed.  Professor B, as I mentioned earlier, she helped as well. I ended up changing my plan because I realized how hard college can be and I wanted it to be worth-while in the end, so I’m just going with a more reliable field. It was marketing but I am changing to Pre-Pharmacy.	Definitely Professor B, the pastor at the Sunday services here, JD.	I guess I would say my peers. As a whole, yes, I would say my peers had the biggest effect on me. It should have been my professors if I had been doing more of what I was supposed to be doing. Like going to see my professors more and studying more with my professors. But my peers have had mostly a positive effect on me; but, I think going forward I’d prefer my professors to have more an effect on me.

	Influenced Perceptions of University	Influenced Decision for Major	Faculty/Staff/Peers/Parents	Greatest Influence
DL	I would have to say first, my mother. She's really always on my back as far as me being successful here. And I would say my advisor— she really has given me great advice as far as when things need to be done, how they need to be done, what steps I need to take to be successful throughout college. I feel like those two main people were really the ones that are making this all possible for me.	<p>No, I actually didn't. I knew coming here I would have a lot of options. Right now, I am still exploring my talents to see what I want to do, to see what I'm good at. So, I should have my career choice probably like the end of this semester or the beginning of next semester. I am still trying to wrap up deciding what I actually want to do.</p> <p>My advisor has been helping me with, as far as what career fits me, what I'm good at, things like that—to choose my major.</p>	<p>Not necessarily. I mean, me coming here, being a Christian, being around a lot of Christian people, meeting new types of people, and getting in different approaches on how people view the world, and how people view things, it's really helpful to me. So, I feel like being at a Christian university just allows you to have that connection with God and also use Him to be successful in life. That's how I felt about the whole situation.</p>	Ok, I would have to say my advisor, Mrs. W. She would have to be one of the key people that I felt like was really helpful to me as far as being a freshman, what I needed to do to be successful here. And I would have to say my New Testament teacher, Mr. D. He's a great impact as far as spreading Christianity, and how going through college and having God in your life is really helpful along the way. We had actually a day class where she came and she talked to us and she set up appointments to her and seeing how things have been going, how your grades are looking. I had one recently, so I've been to her, visiting her, like two or three times already. Every time I go there she gives me the same information, lets me know where I'm at as far as my grades, and make sure I'm on the right track.

	Influenced Perceptions of University	Influenced Decision for Major	Faculty/Staff/Peers/Parents	Greatest Influence
NL	Definitely my friend Yvonne. She's helping me so much here when I have problem. I think without her would be very difficult to organize my life here.	<p>Yeah. I wanted to study psychology and I already knew it.</p> <p>It's just because I had psychology in high school for one year and it was pretty interesting for me. And I was looking for something I would like to do in the future. I know already that I like to help people, that always when I talk with them I try to analyze them. It's why I wanted psychology. On the other hand, sports psychology— because I want to have experience in this special area and I think because I'm playing tennis 4 years and I know some of the problems that athletes struggle with.</p>	My coach because I was in contact with him since last year. We were writing every day to organize things. Yes, so I trust him very much. And another one maybe, my GNED professor. Sometimes he ask how I am doing and I can tell him everything.	My friend Yvonne. Because I talk with her about everything and she also talks about everything with me. We trust each other and support each other.

	Influenced Perceptions of University	Influenced Decision for Major	Faculty/Staff/Peers/Parents	Greatest Influence
RG	Well, my RA—G—he’s a cool person and he helped me get adjusted to college. And I’m in Gospel Choir and CM— he helped me out a lot, too. They’ve been like big brothers.	No ma’am. I’m not sure what I want to do.  I’m supposed to be working on that this semester in my GNED class. I’m in a section of Freshman Seminar with undecided students.	I haven’t really talked to anyone about how hard school has been but as of, like, just inspiring me? Chris, the leader of Gospel Choir One Accord...CM. He’s helped me out a lot. I went to Elevate and he asked us “did we sing?”, and I was like “I use to sing a little bit” and he told me to come to Gospel Choir. He just, like, accepted me and he’s cool.	My Mom, cause she calls me a lot and just tells me how hard I have to work and how much college is important. She just keeps telling me.

	Influenced Perceptions of University	Influenced Decision for Major	Faculty/Staff/Peers/Parents	Greatest Influence
<b>SB</b>	My coach. He's helped me out a lot. I thought he was just going to be my coach—like just softball coach; but, he's also been there to talk to about personal stuff. Like me being homesick and stuff. So, he's been there; and then the upperclassmen, probably. I've gotten close to the upperclassmen and they've introduced me to a lot of their friends, so that's cool.	<p>No; I came in undecided and now I want to do Criminal Justice.</p> <p>It was pretty much me, but I realized because I was so into all the crime scene kind of stuff. I mean, originally I wanted to be a nurse. I wanted to do Nursing, but I've...if I saw someone's arm falling off or something, I'd be like "Oh my Gawd!" I would freak out. I mean Criminal Justice—my Mom was like—every time there was an accident I was like "Mom go drive over there." And then she'd be like, "You're really interested in that kind of stuff." She kind of brought it to my attention and then I thought, 'Ok, I am, actually'.</p>	<p>The first person would probably be my coach and he went to me. He didn't say like, "what's wrong?" or anything; but, he saw that I was a little upset and he was like "I'm here if you need to talk to me." and "I know you don't have your dad here." and "I know that he was one of the persons you always talk to." "And you don't have your mom."— "I could be your dad here if you I don't know if I can say all the people but it's probably the upper class men, too, because they made me feel like 'Oh your sophomore— you're going to be doing this'", and that kind of made me feel like they walked through it, so I knew I was going to be ok.</p> <p>want." He just made me feel that I could talk to him about stuff. He would probably be it.</p>	<p>This is going to sound kind of weird but, I have a boyfriend back home and he's been a big support for me and I cry to him all the time— and my parents; just cause I get homesick a lot. And It's kind of hard not, having any family here. So probably them, just because I can talk to them all the time and they still make me feel like I am at home. They've made a big impact— cause I'm the person to go to college out of my whole entire family- aunts, uncles, grandparents, parents, siblings— and I have two older sisters. So they make me feel like I'm like a really good kid, you know? So that's awesome. They just make me want to try hard cause I want to prove everyone wrong—that I can do it. So, it would probably be my family and boyfriend that made the biggest impact because I want to try hard now and graduate and have a good future.</p>

	Influenced Perceptions of University	Influenced Decision for Major	Faculty/Staff/Peers/Parents	Greatest Influence
BH	I say, basically, my friends on campus. Being that I am a commuter, it was hard to try to actually meet friends on campus.	<p>It's biochemistry. I might want to change it, or not change, or minor, or get a double major in Communication. Since being here, I've listened to a whole lot of music, and people ask me if I want to work with radio and I said "yeah".</p> <p>Professor H. She was helpful. She said I have a good personality, a positive attitude. And I used to have a good voice for it.</p>	<p>Prof. H and Prof. W. I didn't really seek them out. I guess it's just—well Ms. H, I went to her office one time and we had a conversation because it was mandatory. And Mrs. W, she sought me out for that a meeting. It was an assignment that we either had to write a note, do a voice call, or a face to face at her office.</p>	<p>I'd probably say my math professor, Mrs.W. I remember when first coming here I missed a couple of her classes and she sent me a report saying I'm close to getting an FA (failure for absences). My grade in her class wasn't the best grade. So she really set me down and talked to me about it. She told me I had a chance to pull it up, so right now I'm just looking out for that.</p>

## APPENDIX K

### Intuitional Support-Support Services

	Knowledge of Resources Available	Used Resources	Didn't Use Resources
<b>BG</b>	For World Civ I have been going to SI (supplemental instruction) sessions Monday and Tuesday. He explains it way better than Dr. M does. The SI made me understand it a little more. When I am in class I am so dumbfounded, but when I go to the SI session I like how he explains it. I got tutoring for math every Thursday. It helps me a lot cause it's on Thursday and our math test is Friday.	I've been participating in the SI program with my history class; that's all. I had to do that because of my diagnostic test.	I haven't been to the Learning Center. I knew about it, but I didn't go, yet.
<b>BT</b>	The Writing Center—I found out about it at the beginning of the year, I really didn't do anything about it until I had a paper coming up. The tutors helped a lot. Even weeks when I didn't have a paper due, I kept going to make sure that I can fix my thoughts. The Career Center—they had something to help me choose my major or a possible career for me. They helped me try to figure out what I can put on my resume. I was actually an extra credit activity.	Someone referred me to all the resources because whenever I try to find this stuff myself, I can never find it. But when I especially needed it somebody would refer the resources to me.	No response.
<b>RH</b>	The Writing Center—that's also good because they taught me how to use my commas right.	My math teacher referred me to the tutoring, and my English teacher referred me to the Writing Center.	No response



	Knowledge of Resources Available	Used Resources	Didn't Use Resources
<b>BW</b>	World Civ—they have a SI ( <i>supplemental instruction</i> ) session. And math, there's a Math Lab; but, I haven't been to any of them, yet, so.	I know about them—tutoring with math and English and stuff. Well, my teachers told me about them.	I don't know. There's something that always seem to be going on whenever I should be going. I definitely could make time. I just don't. Probably getting bad enough grades—where I'm, “ok I got to change it”. My midterm grades is what really showed me that I need to step it up. Cause, world civ and math were my two lowest and I had a D in them both.  I am going to get help next week. Our diagnostic exam in World Civ is next week, so we're going to that.
<b>JM</b>	I went to the Writing Lab. I went to the library a lot. I study in the library all the time. I also know that I need to get accommodations for extra time on tests and quizzes from Disability Services because of my problem with focusing. It also helped getting to know the whole school before I already came here. I did a campus tour and learned about the academic resources from my Enrollment Counselor.	Oh yeah; the math lab and the writing lab.	I should be using them. I need them. I will definitely start using them now that my grades are so bad.

	Knowledge of Resources Available	Used Resources	Didn't Use Resources
NS	SI ( <i>supplemental instruction</i> ) sessions for World Civ— one of the students who has already taken the class sits in the class again. Before the test you can go to the SI session and he goes over everything. It's a lot easier to hear it from him because he doesn't have to rush through everything and get it done within 50 minutes of time. He meets us at 6 and we'll stay until 10 at night— just go over it with us until we get it. That's all I really used for academic assistance. I know there's a math lab, but I haven't gone to it. Our teacher told us about it and some of the other girls on the soccer team go.	Yes, SI sessions I have gone to—I was required to go because I would get lower than a 55 on the diagnostic test, which I made myself do. It just forced me to go. I didn't have a choice or I wouldn't get credit for the test.	I haven't used the math lab just because I am doing well in math and I haven't needed it to do well on the test.
LC	The math lab, from my professor.	I used the math lab. I didn't go to the Learning Center; I should have.	That's probably why I struggled; I plan to go now.
DL	Places like the Writing Center, Math Lab, Writing Lab, different things like that all came together to be beneficial to me. Actually, one of my teachers, Mrs. C, as far as the Writing Lab— she told me about it— different modules, different places, how it can be helpful outside of class. I have to say my professors were the ones that made me aware.	I have' my professors referred me to them. And also, my advisor referred me to those different things.	No response.

	Knowledge of Resources Available	Used Resources	Didn't Use Resources
<b>NL</b>	We are required to go to the Writing Center for our English class.	Is it just the Writing Center. I know about the Math Lab. I found out about that from a friend of mine.	I know about them but I do not feel I need them just now. Math Lab because I did not have math. I will have it in the spring. Maybe if I need help then I will go there.
<b>RG</b>	The Learning Center, but I haven't gone. I've been hearing about it since day one; but I haven't paid them any attention.	No ma'am, I haven't.	I've honestly been nervous. I don't know why. I just get nervous—think I'm not supposed to go at a certain time. I didn't know if they accept walk-ins. That's all.
<b>SB</b>	The softball girls, probably. They're telling me about tutoring—and my coach is also telling me about tutoring and stuff—and the Learning Center and all that stuff. And also a lot of them have already taken the classes I'm taking and they already know a lot of it, too, so I can go to them. And if they didn't know it, I'd go to tutoring.	My teacher for World Civ— he has this student teach us and I go to him sometimes at night—the Supplemental Instruction program. I like that a lot because we can go to him to ask questions, outside of class.	I haven't used the Learning Center yet. I don't think I've needed it yet.

	Knowledge of Resources Available	Used Resources	Didn't Use Resources
<b>BH</b>	<p>I feel because there is so many things at the school that we have the writing center, the Student Success Center and we have the math lab center. So I feel like, there shouldn't be no reason for things to be as bad because we have so many tutoring options that are free. Being in the Bridge Academy you have to go the My Writing lab—the writing lab center. The teachers tell you this is how you can pass a course and it's upon yourself to do them. For English, my teacher made us get into study groups— We also have a response group outside of English class. For math, I took my English teacher's idea and made a response group for that. The same thing with music appreciation. The learning center I learned from English class and then in math, she had a handout that said it gave the office hours and I think it was in the syllabus, too, about the Learning Center.</p>	<p>Every Wednesday that we don't have chapel I'm in the math lab center and every Tuesday at 12, after my English class, I am in the writing lab.</p>	<p>No resonse.</p>

## APPENDIX L

### Social Adjustment

	Social Opportunity	Social Involvement	Social Adjustment	Faculty Interaction	Forming Peer Friendships
<b>BG</b>	They post things in the Quads so you have to notice it.	<p>I'm not involved in nothing except for football. (clubs or organizations)</p> <p>This past week during homecoming I went to a few things. I work out at the Brewer Center. And I work out with the football team in the weight room.</p> <p>I went to the volleyball game. I watch basketball cause I have a friend who plays basketball.</p> <p>No(cultural events).</p> <p>Not that socially active. Not to regular students. I don't really talk to them like that.</p>	<p>You're in college and independent and you're around all your friends instead of being around you mom and stuff. You got to make your own decisions.</p> <p>I don't fit in like that but some people don't have the same circumstances that I do— just where I came from. I mean I just grew up kind of rough. I lost my daddy at two weeks old, so I never really had a father figure. I mean I grew up doing some crazy stuff. I have my Mom. She does what she can. She got four boys.</p>	I go talk to my advisor all the time—at least once or twice a week just to check up on everything—make sure everything is going good. Mrs. H, like she says, she in my corner. She's just trying to help me. I talk to her about things.	To be honest I don't even try. I just go with the flow. The only people I really hang with is the football team. I just know everybody on the football team. I have a couple friends on the basketball team.

	Social Opportunity	Social Involvement	Social Adjustment	Faculty Interaction	Forming Peer Friendships
BT	<p>The first one would be GNED, she told us about a lot of stuff. She told us a lot of ways to go through the activities. Just the other week for the the University vs Greenville football game there was free tickets that helped me get out socially. From my classmates—they just openly talk about it. They'd yell "go to so-and-so..."</p>	<p>I tried going to some student organizations. I didn't really get into it. I thought it would be more like a social thing. It felt like more work. It didn't feel like I was supposed to be there. It wasn't a chain reaction of emotions where you could feel people becoming friends or family. I'd like to, but I was the kid, literally, always had the ball slammed into my face. So I was discouraged into going to the recreational activities. I have been to one or two.(athletic events) If I knew I had friends who were coming with me, I'd probably be more into it; but I just didn't see any reason for me going by myself. Unfortunately, no. I wish I could. I wish I actually I found time to do that, cause not only would it be good in finding myself, but just also seeing other cultures as well. I wanted to go to a play on one of the days, but I was studying so much.</p> <p>As far as being involved with the campus—not particularly. Outside of campus— I am definitely socially active. I've been social in my church, amongst my circle, but with the people I haven't been as social as I could be. May be, if I could find someone who had the same mindset—had the same things I enjoy.</p>	<p>Socially, I'm trying to squeeze in study time, but I also want to be with my friends, my girlfriend, my church. I find that a little hard —with my classes and my studies; but, I know that my sanity is as important; my friends are important; but, my college life is also important.</p> <p>On campus, I guess I am more of a wallflower. I have one or two friends; but, I I'm not really big on social activities.</p>	<p>Some of them, but it was for class. Sometimes we would talk about just family stuff, sometimes we'd talk about what could be done about a paper—but other than that, I haven't talked to them personally. Like, I haven't talked to them about something that wasn't related to school work.</p>	<p>Surprisingly, it's been easy, but I blame my personality. I don't know whether it's just me or if it's because of other people; but, I tend to form friendships when I have those random bursts of being extroverted.</p>

	Social Opportunity	Social Involvement	Social Adjustment	Faculty Interaction	Forming Peer Friendships
<b>RH</b>	I went to the sorority thing with Lambda something and they talked about it and how we can get involved and get more friends, I guess. RAs ( <i>resident assistants in the dorms</i> )—they pass out papers under our doors all the time—”Come to get coffee with us or come get cookies!”	<p>I would have to say Elevate (campus Christian organization) because I’m not really involved in clubs. I’m home every weekend just because I’m a family person. My sister and me get along real well. My brother has hockey games all the time.</p> <p>I’ve been to a few football games—just like one or two. Just because they’re undefeated and people were like —“oh my gosh— CSU is undefeated—” and it’s not usually like that.</p> <p>Football.</p> <p>I’ve been to “Elevate” but no plays or musicals.</p>	<p>I’m used to having a big group of friends— but here, it’s like a new start because all my friends went to USC or Clemson and no one came here. I still have a few friends here which is good, I guess.</p> <p>Well, I’m not really involved in any extra activities or clubs, but I think I’m doing pretty well cause I meet people through Elevate and people I sit next to in Chapel. I’m social and I will talk to anyone.</p> <p>Not what I’m used to, but I do talk to a lot of people. It’s just a lot of people don’t keep in touch.</p>	No. (Did not interact with faculty outside of class)	It can go both ways, depending on who you socialize with. Like, some of these people here—like my roommates— they started off easy, we were friends and then, it just didn’t work out.

	Social Opportunity	Social Involvement	Social Adjustment	Faculty Interaction	Forming Peer Friendships
BW	Being a commuter, it's hard to know everything that's going on, so I have some friends who live on campus that will inform me of things going on.	<p>I've been to a few things, like, the pep rally last week at night. I don't really go to too much. We were doing a Bible study but we stopped that a couple weeks ago because it was on Monday nights and we always had homework.</p> <p>Some football games, but that's it. I haven't been to any other athletics.</p> <p>I don't think so. Nope, that's probably my problem. I definitely never check it just cause I never think to.</p>	<p>Not really, because I have all my friends from high school— they pretty much go here.</p> <p>So, it's not like it's been hard to make friends, because I have known them forever.</p> <p>I mean, ok. I'm fitting in pretty well.</p> <p>I haven't really attended too many events, so, I could probably go to some more. Be more sociable.</p>	Nope, not really. I don't really run into my professors anywhere other than in class.	It was different because in my high school we were really close with our teachers just cause we had such small classes, so it was really easy just to talk to them and have relationships with them. But here, it's a little harder— just because the classes are a little bigger and professors don't always know everybody yet.



	Social Opportunity	Social Involvement	Social Adjustment	Faculty Interaction	Forming Peer Friendships
JM	My grandma told me about the Brewer Center. I went there and started playing ping pong. I ended up reading some signs in there and found out about soccer. I found out about flag-football and did that. Before that I found out the campus was doing a capture the flag event and I did that. I found that out from friends. Then the people sitting in the lunch room signing up for scavenger hunt.	<p>Not particularly.(clubs and organizations)</p> <p>I've been to Elevate and the church on campus.</p> <p>Actually, I went to a softball game. No football games. It's weird—it's kind of cause I don't want to see my ex-girl friend. I don't want to run into her.</p> <p>Oh yeah, I went to a couple of plays.</p>	<p>Kind of, yeah. I actually have been trying to choose better friends rather than the friends I have back home because some of them aren't the best influences. I have some that are better than others. But particularly, here I like to be involved with Elevate and students that want the same thing for their lives.</p> <p>I guess ok. I mean I have my group of friends. Not really a problem but I get some bad vibes from some people—like they don't want to talk to me. People that are friends with my ex-girlfriend.</p> <p>Very.(socially active)</p>	Yeah—my math teacher plays intramural soccer. We played like, two days ago. They beat us—the faculty team!	Oh, easy

	Social Opportunity	Social Involvement	Social Adjustment	Faculty Interaction	Forming Peer Friendships
NS	<p>I went to the Pep Rally the other night, which was fun. I have been going to the different sporting events, which is cool. It's just, you're with everyone. You don't even have to be friends with the person next to you, but you're cheering for the same team so -you just make friends. That's what I did at the volleyball game the other day. I showed up by myself and because we were all cheering for the same team and just trying to have fun, you just start talking to people and you laugh with people. It's easy. One of my friends from my English class who's on the volleyball team told me about it. I just showed up and there's a bunch of people there. So, yeah, word of mouth.</p>	<p>I go to FCA. I am on the soccer team, but I haven't joined any clubs because we're in season right now. It was really hard to balance everything and I wanted to make sure I was ahead of the game—academically. So maybe next semester.</p> <p>I went to the Citadel football game, which was really cool. I went to two volleyball games.</p> <p>I attend football and volleyball games.</p> <p>I went to the Culture Fest-it was fun- lively. I went to the <i>Antigone</i> play for English — but I really enjoyed it. And then I went to one of the concerts because I had to for Music Appreciation, which was nice, too. It was just nice to be there.</p>	<p>My last years of high school I was with one guy so I didn't hang with my friends. He isolated me from my friends and family. So I came here without him. I didn't know how to make friends; I didn't know how to talk to people. It was awful and so I was really lonely. That actually made me closer to my mom. Once I ended things with him, I have the best friends ever.</p> <p>I think I am really fitting in really well. I just don't feel afraid to talk to people and I want people to like get to know me — just know that I am a good person. I just want to be friends with good people who will help me and not pull me back.</p>	<p>I don't think that I have actually. Like my professors and stuff? No, I don't.</p>	<p>I think people need time to be able to adjust in their surroundings and some people just take longer, like me. Once you start living with these people and you get to spend every day with them, you get to know who they are and what they do. You don't really have a choice. Me and my best friend from home are rooming together with another girl. We kind of had to put ourselves in her shoes because she came all the way from Pennsylvania. So, she had no one coming here and she had to room with these two girls who were best friends. So we knew it would be hard so we did our best to just help her feel part of our friendship.</p>

	<b>Social Opportunity</b>	<b>Social Involvement</b>	<b>Social Adjustment</b>	<b>Faculty Interaction</b>	<b>Forming Peer Friendships</b>
<b>LC</b>	I see stuff posted different places.	<p>I'm not involved in any. I have been informed, but I've kind of ignored it.</p> <p>I played intramural basketball. I go to the Brewer Center often because they have a room where you can sit down, watch TV and play ping pong.</p> <p>I have been to football, games-that is where I met Mr. E. He's cool.</p> <p>Open mic night- I only stayed for a couple of minutes.</p> <p>Not very much. I work at Foot Locker.</p>	<p>With the faculty and staff the social adjustment is fine. Some peers definitely make you feel weird. I'm just floating under the radar. They made sure we had all kind of activities to where you met each other. Then you have different things they put on the café table so you know what is going on, socially. So, I think the institution does its part</p> <p>It's probably more myself. I don't know. It's kind of me. It could be a time issue, but I know I hold back a lot. I don't really like attention. Maybe that's my personality, then.</p>	I have because you often run into your professors walking around campus—just about every day, every class change. They speak to you if you ever stop them and talk to them; they will stop and talk to you.	Difficult— but at the same time, I guess it's like that for everybody—I mean, you meet some people you can easily connect with, and you meet some people you don't connect with.

	Social Opportunity	Social Involvement	Social Adjustment	Faculty Interaction	Forming Peer Friendships
DL	There were different meetings held just to get to know people, see how you like the school- it was actually called <i>Playfair</i> . It really made me feel welcomed, you know—knowing that you could come here and meet new people.	<p>No—but once I get used to focusing more on my school work, I feel like those extra things will come eventually.</p> <p>I recently participated in the football intramural and I plan on being a part of the basketball intramurals.</p> <p>Yes. I love football. I’m mostly at every home game. My whole life, I’ve played football. I’m a really big fan.</p> <p>I’ve been to a couple of concerts for Music Apprec.—to do concert critiques. Going to Chapel on Wednesdays, having new people coming from different places and spreading the word around to us.</p>	<p>Socially, yes, I feel like it’s a big adjustment. Here you meet new people every day, different people from all types of places. I feel like I fit in. I love meeting new people. I love new experiences. So, I would have to say, socially I’ve really been impacted by different people.</p> <p>Very socially active—not just in class, but outside of class. Being around people, going to Public Speaking class, having to give speeches around a large crowd, different things like that.</p>	Yeah, I have. Mr. D, outside of class, I talk to him, as far as, getting to be a better Christian and what I can do outside of class. I met with him a couple of times in the Library and I met with him a couple of times in Java City. My professor, Mrs. C, she really motivates me because she always wants to see me succeed. She’s always happy to see me. Every time I’m not in class, she’s worried about me.	It’s very easy to meet new people. I’m down to earth and love to have fun. So, I just bring around positive energy to people and that’s always good. I felt like being a Christian, we all have the same view as far as believing in God and wanting to be better in God’s way. So, I felt like me being here and me being around these certain type of people was very beneficial to me and helped me be friendly towards them.

	<b>Social Opportunity</b>	<b>Social Involvement</b>	<b>Social Adjustment</b>	<b>Faculty Interaction</b>	<b>Forming Peer Friendships</b>
<b>NL</b>	I use the website to look up stuff. I decided to go to the campus activities because it's easier for me to schedule it with my practices and classes.	<p>So far I am not attending any organizations. I want to attend the Psychology Club but I am not able because I have classes at this time. But it would just be too overwhelming because I really have so much stuff going on because I'm an athlete. I am used to it because in Germany, I had to stay in high school and practice after school.</p> <p>Not so much; I'm busy with athletic practice and studying. (recreational activities)</p> <p>I saw one volleyball match and one football match.</p> <p>No, not so far.(cultural events</p>	<p>The people here are more friendly. When I'm sitting in the Café eating alone someone sits with me and talks with me and asks me about Germany or the classes.</p> <p>So far I think it's pretty good. They are very curious that I am from another country— asking me questions about Germany. But they don't exclude me because of it.</p> <p>Honestly not so much, I guess. I mean I'm just doing my classes and my athletics. Time has been the obstacle for me.</p>	I had to with my English professor two times because I was absent because of tournaments. So I had to talk about my grade, my assignments, about work I missed.	They are pretty friendly. So for me it's easier to form relationships with them. Some students are just too curious or too friendly; that I don't like —to form relationships with them, because in Germany, if someone is too friendly it can mean that they are false.

	Social Opportunity	Social Involvement	Social Adjustment	Faculty Interaction	Forming Peer Friendships
RG	<p>Well, like the first social event—<i>Playfair</i>, I didn't go cause my family was here and I didn't know anything about it. I was just sitting in the dorms, so I didn't know— my roommates or suitemates or anybody. They all came back at one time and I was, like, "where did y'all go?" Students, they'll put things on your door and we'll read those. Like, yesterday— I went to a movie outside at the baseball field.</p>	<p>Well, I'm in One Accord Gospel Choir and I am in a smaller praise team. I think that's all I'm in. We go to different places around Charleston and we sing some places. We might go to Savannah, GA—the praise team— and sing.</p> <p>I've attended a few things, when I know about them.</p> <p>I've attended a few things, when I know about them.</p> <p>I attended a woodwind ensemble.</p>	<p>I don't think it has, really cause I had a lot of friends in high school. Now, I am starting to get a lot of friends here, too.</p> <p>Well, I fit in pretty nice. I don't mean to get people to start talking to me. I don't know, it just happens. I guess I'm doing pretty well.</p> <p>I think I've been pretty good. I guess, since I'm in Gospel Choir, people know me. I didn't know how people knew me but I just assumed. Like, people say "That's the boy that can sing."</p>	<p>I shook hands. The Gospel Choir sang at half time at the football game and my Music Appreciation teacher—he was one of the instructors there—he told us we did a good job and I was, like, "thank you." That was all. And Dr. B, for Old Testament— I went to his office. Yeah, we talked for a few minutes and we just talked about homework.</p>	<p>I found it easier because I thought it was hard the first three days; but I adjusted and I knew I wasn't going to know anyone unless I went up and said something.</p>

	Social Opportunity	Social Involvement	Social Adjustment	Faculty Interaction	Forming Peer Friendships
SB	Probably just different girls. Hanging out with them, they share this; they share that; and then it just—gets bigger and bigger from there. I guess—mostly word of mouth.	<p>I go to a lot of campus outreaches. I go to Elevate and the Pep Rally we had Fall Fest—before the homecoming football game. I go to a lot of those things and I go to church on Sundays here. I would say I get pretty involved.</p> <p>I have—probably all of them. And there are little things in the dorms like PJ party if you want to go—they’re fun.</p> <p>Yes, I have. Of course all the softball games because I play. I go to the football games. Like plays, or musicals or concerts—things like that? I haven’t done any of the plays or anything. I really didn’t know anything about that.</p>	<p>In high school I knew absolutely everybody. I went to a small school in California. Then coming here, you’re just another freshman. I was a big fish in a little pond; and now I feel like a little fish in a big pond. It so true; I went from knowing everyone—and then you didn’t know anyone.</p> <p>I think better than I thought I would. The first week I was eating by myself and now I know a lot of different people. That’s why I like love it,—cause it’s so small. I can meet everyone real fast.</p> <p>I think I’ve been a little too socially active. I’m really friendly. I’ll go and hang out with other girls—even if she’s someone I don’t know.</p>	Not really; probably just my advisor, obviously—and then my coach. Like, we talk outside of softball. I mean we talk about home stuff.	Definitely easy—a lot easier than I thought it was going to be. Yeah.

	Social Opportunity	Social Involvement	Social Adjustment	Faculty Interaction	Forming Peer Friendships
<b>BH</b>	<p>All the billboards and flyers across campus. Like, I remember one time I wanted to go to this commuter campout so bad but I had class. It was either go to class or go to the cookout. I went to class.</p>	<p>Not into any student organization because my schedule between work and school. But I want to be involved in some student organizations. I want to actually pledge and then I also wanted to see if I could talk to somebody about getting a campus radio.</p> <p>At the beginning of the semester Alpha Phi Alpha was throwing a pool party- I went to that. It was right before I went to work. Yeah, the football games.</p> <p>I went to Cultural Fest and the Hispanic Heritage one I think that's pretty much it.</p>	<p>For me to make friends, it's not hard. My Mom says I have too many friends sometimes. So, socially, nothing has changed. I still keep a small circle, not as big as I did in high school, I guess.</p> <p>I mean, apparently my name is known across campus, I guess. It's weird being on campus, cause I'm a commuter and like, I come to school and somebody across the pond knows me and be like "Hey BH!" People say that I'm a big person—I mean; I'm a little person inside a big person's body.</p>	<p>Just my English and Math teachers, at the math lab and the writing lab.</p>	<p>It's not hard to find a good relationship if you really want a relationship; but if you are trying to find a relationship that just nothing but physical, it's going to be hard to find on this campus. This campus doesn't roll like that.</p>



## APPENDIX M

### Challenges and Change

	Biggest Challenge	How You Have Changed
<b>BG</b>	The biggest problem is I don't have none of my books. It's just cause of the financial aid. I haven't got it all paid off. I just been trying my best. I talk to my advisor all the time. Mrs. H, she is trying to help me. We are trying to get some financial aid.	<p>I've changed by my work ways and just trying to manage my time so I can get stuff done.</p> <p>I've got like more time on my hands since I don't have practice and stuff. I try to just take care of everything and do what I can. So I have to be more independent.</p>
<b>BT</b>	For me, it's not panicking about everything. I try to do my best and everything, but it feels like I am doing something wrong, always. People that helped me were the teachers and some of my friends—all of them trying to get me to relax and try to be confident in myself—confident that I can actually get through all of this—like through my work, through studying and like trying to balance myself out—all of the responsibilities.	Emotionally— my girlfriend, my church, again, the staff—they kept me together. Academically—the free help and the tutoring helped a lot with my academics— seeing what I could do better in or how I can get my thoughts out. Socially, I'm not good at doing many things socially. I tried to do it on my own. I try to do things socially, but it's kind of impossible.
<b>RH</b>	I would have to say problems with my roommate problem. And the Dean—he helped out a ton. It's resolved now. That was my big challenge here so far.	Well, my roommate problems have made me be more aware of having to get along with other people. That's been a real challenge—dealing with the roommate issue. But, Jess and Audrey have really helped me out.
<b>BW</b>	The biggest challenge for me is, obviously, deciding my major.	I definitely realized that I have to be more responsible with homework and going to class and studying. In high school, it was easy; but, it's a little harder here. I've been going to more church related things, like Elevate and stuff, and —before I was just going to my old high school's one—so it's cool to go to a different one and just see how it is here.

	Biggest Challenge	How You Have Changed
JM	Probably my biggest my challenge right now, I'm not living on campus. I think for a full college campus experience you should live on campus. And I really want to move on to campus. But at the same time, I wouldn't mind living off campus, but I want to be a lot closer. The travel every day is just hard—not distance so much but traffic is a pain trying to get here in the morning.	Not really much. I feel like I like changed and I wasn't something different. I feel like I am doing the same old thing every day.
NS	I am definitely a procrastinator, so that doesn't help. In high school, I never studied because you just didn't really have to. Here, you definitely do and you have to like read. The professors don't go over the textbook with you in class. You have to go over it before class, even if they don't tell you to—you just have to do it. That's been so hard. We have mandatory study hall hours ( <i>required for athletes below 3.0 GPA</i> ) and that really, really helps. For example, one of my classes we take SI ( <i>supplemental instruction</i> ) exams—or like diagnostic exams, and you have to get above 55 to have to go to the SI sessions. So, I just don't study for those and I try to do bad on them so that I know that I have to go to the SI session. Because if I don't have to go—I won't go. They really help. I just have to trick myself to do everything possible.	Well, I definitely changed in like, I study now. I never studied before and I think I am more mature. I feel like I am taking things more seriously—like the things that have to be taken seriously, I know that I am trying. You go into high school and there's all this drama and now you just like, know better, you know what I mean? And I think I've just grown as a person and I've done my best to get the people out of my life who aren't good. I just broke up with my boyfriend because—something just hit me and I was like “This isn't good. He's not helping me.” I am just trying to get everything out of my life that isn't good. I think it's hard to be mature when you are in high school because you are surrounded by people who just feed on the drama. So I think being here and being around older people and people who have been through everything really helps. I guess I feel more responsible.

	Biggest Challenge	How You Have Changed
LC	<p>I've had struggles because I'm soft-spoken. I'm very private, but I still want to interact and get along with other people. Growing up, I never had friends of a different race, so that was one of my goals when I got here. It didn't go so well until I met my friend Raymond. It's a white guy and that's probably my best friend now. I never imagined myself having a white friend— not only a white friend, but just somebody I'd probably call my brother. So he made my college experience so much better after meeting him. I honestly say that at this college, the professionals here are ethically balanced. They don't treat you any different— no matter what color you are. The students— I guess it's going to be that way regardless— you get some vibes like some of them you can tell, they've been raised to where they don't realize what color you are. You know, they are just nice to you. Then some of them, they don't really just openly treat you wrong but they shy away from you when you try to show them you are no different. I guess it takes time for some people to warm up to going to a school with different races.</p>	<p>When I got here and I wasn't outgoing at all. Then I decided to try because my friends would always say that I just don't want to meet new people and I don't talk to anybody. That's why I think everybody is into the social stuff and then I tried it for a good while. It just didn't turn out good. I just can't figure it out. I mean it's kind of declining more and more—my social ability, I guess I would say. I think I was trying to relate it to high school and kind of make it like high school where everybody loved me— all the teachers, all the students. I just got along with everybody. Here, it's just not working out for me. So I just kind of stick with my small group of friends. I just think that I am a freshman and the longer time I'm here the communication with the faculty will get better. It's not that it's bad because all my teachers speak to me and they talk to me. That's going fine. I think with the students it's just—I'm just a lot different from them and I'm not willing to change it. I don't have basketball shorts and jogging pants. I don't believe that you should even do that every day. So it just makes me feel awkward around everybody.</p>

	Biggest Challenge	How You Have Changed
<b>DL</b>	I feel like the biggest challenge was managing my time, as far as classes, school work, extracurricular activities, all coming together. Knowing I'm a freshman, it's a fresh start, new things, and you just want to enjoy it while you have it; but at the same time, you just got to make sure that those books come first. So, managing time is very important. And I've had many people to tell me, of course my mother, before I ever came to college, she told me "you gonna be a freshman, you gonna have fun or whatever, but at the same time make sure that those studies come first."	I would have to say what's changed me—it involves my mindset. My mindset is a little bit different -especially when I first came here, I felt like I didn't know what I was doing here. I didn't know if I really fit in, I didn't know if this was for me; but, after getting around all these positive people and positive influences, it's really been helpful to me as far as being a successful student. So I have to say, more than likely, my advisor and my professors are really that extra motivation because all they want to do is see me succeed. So that's always helpful.
<b>NL</b>	I think the biggest challenge is definitely homesickness because I'm from another country. I handle with it through Skype. I Skype every week and with my boyfriend, it's also a problem— every second day. This was my first time in this country. It's pretty hard; especially also I have a younger sister. She's just one year and a half younger, so we are soul mates. It's really hard. There's some culture shock for me. Just the usual habits I have in Germany. Just like in Germany, it was normal in the evening to watch tv with my family and here is just in the evening studying. It's just like my daily habits are completely different here. Also the food is different. The people here are much more friendly than in Germany. In Germany it's like everyone concentrate on themselves . Here everyone is asking "How are you?", "How are you doing?" Smile at you. It's not the same in Germany.	I think I start becoming a little bit more independent and I have to learn to handle this emotions connected with the home sickness and stuff like this. I think it helps me becoming a little bit stronger. It's very difficult but also very different from my school at home. For example, how the tests are made up its completely different. In Germany, it's like all the time the same, you have to summarize the text, analyze the text, and then to apply background knowledge. But here it's just like studying, studying, studying. We have the same system for every text to analyze, actually. We learn it in every subject but it's basically the same. It's much more easy. I mean it was easier to study for an exam. Because I just don't have to memorize everything to really understand it

	Biggest Challenge	How You Have Changed
<b>RG</b>	I thought my biggest challenge would be getting to know people. It wasn't that hard. I made friends quick. Adjusting to the workload has been my biggest challenge. I talked to my Mom and she tells me I gotta start working hard and college is expensive. I think about that and that makes me want to study.	Well, I honestly think my morals have gotten better. Like, before I do something, I honestly think, like, how would it affect me? Like, if it's bad—I've stopped and thought about it. I haven't really been bad or anything.
<b>SB</b>	Probably time managing and like sleep. I've been really tired. Cause we have to do 8 hours of study hall every week. So I have to go to school, then I have to go to the library for two hours, but we still have practice. I still have to eat at the Café. I get out of the library at 9pm and still have extra homework that I have to do in my room. Then I go to bed late. And we have to get up for 6:45am for weights in the morning. So it's been really hard and I've been really tired. And then we have to work out during practice. I'm pretty much doing it on my own. Yeah. I mean...because normally my Mom would sit there but she's so far away.	Spiritually, I probably got a lot stronger because it's really been hard because I had to keep praying that everything's going to be ok. And emotionally, I've probably been like...probably cried the most that I have ever cried before. Because I just get homesick, because I am really close to my family. So, that's probably been the thing that's really hard. I mean emotionally—it's just been hard.
<b>BH</b>	Probably getting up in the morning. Being that I'm a commuter, it's hard because traffic can get bad. Now I know that, so I set my schedule up for next semester for all my classes to be sort of back to back. I will have at least some type of free time between classes and still be able to go to lunch and manage my work schedule. I also work at Subway about 35 hours a week.	My friends on campus. I wouldn't say they are like super Christian, but they're close to being super Christian. They changed me a little bit. I'd say that I don't rant and rave or curse out that many people any more. Try to keep it calm. I would say that my professor, Mrs. H, makes me feel comfortable being in class. Really, if she wasn't my Bridge professor, I don't know if I'd still be the same person. I'd really like to thank her.